

Passion Sunday 2020



The normal colour for Lent in church is purple – so a purple altar cover, pulpit fall, stole (the ‘scarf’ the priest wears) and chasuble (the ‘poncho’ the priest wears). But today I wanted to write about the white stole that I wear for feast days – such as Easter day.

Back in my old Lincolnshire parish of Boothby Graffoe I was due to take the wedding of the churchwarden’s daughter. Her mother, Jane, was a Lincoln cathedral embroiderer and said that she would like to make me a stole for the wedding. Jane asked what design I wanted for a wedding stole and I said, promptly,

‘Passion flower’. It is a plant I love. I first came to know it on holiday in France. I had even managed to get it to grow around my Rectory back door where it flowered profusely, even on a windy hilltop in Lincolnshire.

A passion flower bears beautiful intricate flowers. The early South American explorers who first discovered it saw in the flowers great religious symbolism of Christ’s Passion, and so it became known as the passion flower. This is how the symbolism goes:

- 10 petals and sepals = 10 faithful disciples (excl. Peter and Judas).
- Radial filaments = crown of thorns
- Pointed tips to leaves = lance which pierced Christ’s side
- Tendrils = whips used by soldiers on Christ’s body
- 3 stigma = 3 nails; 5 anthers = 5 wounds.
- Blue and white colour = heaven and purity. In Christian art the flower stands for ‘faith and piety’.

Why would I choose the symbols of Christ’s passion to go on a wedding stole? The word ‘Passion’ means a strong emotion/love (according to the dictionary). The Passion flower is a reminder of Christ’s strong and everlasting love for us; a love so strong that he endured the cross for us.

God has always wanted us to be close to him, to be his sons and daughters, to be the children of God. But we were created by God with free-will, free to choose good or evil. The Fall is the story of our choosing wrongly, because we are selfish and proud and greedy. The Old Testament is the story of God calling us back to him through his prophets. Finally God himself comes to us in Jesus Christ. Some people follow, but still many do not. Many turn away. Finally Judas exercises ultimate free will and betrays Jesus, condemning him to death. Jesus dies on the cross on Friday of Holy Week.

That Friday we call ‘Good’ Friday, because it is not the end of the story. Human beings, symbolised in Judas, have done their worst. They have chosen evil instead of good, and rejected God. But God doesn’t reject us, he doesn’t abandon us. We are like the prodigal son, grabbing our inheritance before the right time and running off to what we think is freedom, only to find it is worse than living with the pigs. Luckily God is like the father in that story, keeping a look out for us to turn round and running to meet us on our way back. On Easter day God raised Jesus from death to new life, because good is stronger than evil. In the risen Christ God forgave sinful humanity and brought us forgiveness. Easter Day means that we can once more be children of God, God’s sons and daughters.

It is in that context of Christ’s strong and enduring love for us that we worship today, Passion Sunday, dispersed as we are in our scattered homes during this difficult time. It is more important than ever that we pray together and apart, giving thanks for all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ and praying for all whose lives have been turned upside down by Covid-19.

Collect for Passion Sunday

Most merciful God, who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ delivered and saved the world: grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross we may triumph in the power of his victory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, Amen.

Revd Canon Kathryn Windslow