



# Bishop David Oakley

Bishop of Northampton



## Letter for Passion Sunday 2024

24th March 2024

### To my dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

A reflection on this Passion Sunday Gospel may begin with a question, which Gospel? Many of us will hear the account of Jesus sending two of his disciples to the village to find a tethered colt. Jesus even gives the disciples the answer they must use if anyone questions them about this seeming act of theft. Jesus then rides into Jerusalem to a rapturous welcome from some at least. We listen to this Gospel before our liturgical re-enactment of this moment by procession into our churches. It's a strange story. We very easily get the sense that Jesus is in charge. He is not only the central figure in these events, he is director and producer too.

Things seem to change very quickly when we consider the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. This year we listen to St Mark's account of these events. The action begins in Bethany and the woman 'wasting' the expensive perfume over Jesus' head. There is much for us to ponder here. Are we so generous in our witness to our faith in Christ? Are we prepared to become disciples without counting the cost? Again, we need to hold this truth in our hearts. All this is about Jesus. This event is a mystical prelude to what Jesus will accomplish on the Cross. He will be obedient to the Father's will and lay down his life in love for us.

There is so much mystery in the story which unfolds. Again, disciples are sent into the city and invited to prepare the room where Jesus and his disciples will eat the Passover. This is not any ordinary table reservation in a local hostelry. The moment echoes the earlier one with the finding of the colt for Jesus to ride into the city. Now they must follow a man carrying a pitcher of water. Something in all of this may encourage our hearts to look forward to the Easter Vigil. There will be water there. The blessing of the font. Possibly baptisms, and certainly our renewal of baptismal commitment with the sprinkling of water.

At the end of the Passover meal, psalms are sung and Jesus and his disciples leave for the Mount of Olives. Things seem to change. The weakness of the disciples is very much on display. Something seems to slip away from Jesus himself. We hear the chilling words of the traitor, 'the one I kiss, he is the man. Take him in charge'. It seems that others are now in command. Despite the prophetic words of our Lord, 'you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven', there is an inevitable impetus towards the death and destruction of Jesus of Nazareth.

The desolation reaches a new pinnacle when Jesus cries out from the Cross, 'My God, my God, why have you deserted me?' And if others are assured this prefaces the end of it all, through the gift of faith, we know differently. We hear the testimony of one who came to faith whilst standing at the foot of the Cross. We too echo the words of the centurion, 'Truly this man was the son of God.'

Sincerely,

**Bishop David Oakley**

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