

**Friday 7 April 2023**

# The way of the Cross

Good Friday meditations at the foot of the Cross



**Text of all meditations** © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

**Bible readings** © The publishers of the NRSV translation.

**Monologue of Simon of Cyrene** © Kahlil Gibran (1928, Alfred A Knopf, New York).

**Extract from the Dream of the Rood** © Roy Liuzza (tr.) and available [online](#).

**Collects and liturgy** © 2000 The Archbishops' Council (adapted).

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

**Contents**

1 Introducing a new way ..... 3

2 Behind the scenes..... 5

3 But why a cross? ..... 6

4 A mathematical cross ..... 8

5 The cross on a letter..... 9

6 Imagining ourselves on the way of the Cross: the stations ..... 10

7 Imagining characters from the crucifixion narrative..... 12

8 Jesus himself speaks from the cross ..... 14

9 Interrogating the cross itself: the *Dream of the Rood* ..... 16

10 What’s the historical ‘way of the cross’? ..... 19

11 We walk in the way of the cross. .... 20

## 1 Introducing a new way

In the majesty of the throne room of Heaven, God surrounded Himself with a love too vast to even attempt its description. Like all love that is genuine, the love of God needed to find expression. That expression started when He created a world that was exquisite and perfect in every detail. He peopled it with humankind as the proof of his love and creativity. He made men and women as beings capable of love, like Him, and capable of freewill. But that freewill allowed them — us — to choose love or choose to act against His love. Only time would tell which we would choose.

And time did tell and we did choose: God saw his creation commit sin after crime after sin after crime.

But love always hopes, always perseveres. Soon God was planning the next phase of creation, this time preparing to fill the people He'd made with Himself, with His Spirit. He told them of His plans through the folk He'd elevated and called prophets. One such was Jeremiah, 'The days are coming,' God said through Jeremiah, 'When I will make a new covenant with my people. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbour or say to one another, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest and I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.'

But how to go about it? The constraints were severe. It had to involve humans as well as God for it could not work against His prize creation of freewill. It certainly had to start with forgiveness. And it needed to express overwhelming love. Therefore, in the throne-room of God, there arose the most audacious outpouring of love ever attempted. God would come to earth as a human; as a human-God, God would take our sins onto Himself into this God-man; once forgiveness was secure, God would then pour His life-giving, love-giving Spirit into all of us. That way, we would actually *know* Him and thereby choose Him rather than choose sin.

But how to fine tune this act of love? How would God break into the creation He'd made? After God come to earth as a human, He would let this human grow to adulthood then fill Him with pure Spirit. This solitary yet perfect man would be God incarnate. The God-man would then take our sins and deal with them once for all.

But would he deal with sins over a lifetime (tricky: we might not notice so gradual a change). Would He do it in an instant, then (dangerous: we are fragile and don't cope well with stress and change). Very well: let's redeem sinful human over the space of, say, a week culminating in a great breakthrough. And just to make sure, let's call it 'Holy week'.

**Let us pray**

Lord, you make a gift of death  
to bring us to new life:  
free us from our need  
to fix and own your name  
so we may look for the day  
when you are lifted high  
and all are drawn  
into the arms of love;  
through Jesus Christ, the passion of God.

**All Amen.**



## 2 Behind the scenes

Before we look at the cross in more detail, I'm going to tell a short story. At face value it's obviously fiction but at a far deeper level it *is* true.

Last year, I went on a time-travellers' holiday. For a fee, I could go anywhere in the world and at any period in time. Being a Christian I chose (of course!) to go to the Holy Land for the first Holy Week.

I arrived. Straightaway, I noticed the heat, the noise, and dirt. And how small everything seemed! I checked in to a small hovel in what today we would call 'Old Jerusalem' but then was quite new. Next day was the Sunday before Passover so I rose early. I wanted a good view when Jesus rode past on his donkey. And I saw everything—what an experience!

I enjoyed the rest of the week, but was inwardly waiting for its end, the scene with Pilate. I was not disappointed. The crowd was huge, so I was nowhere near the front. Suddenly there was Jesus standing before Pilate. All of us shouted, "Crucify him!" We repeated it at all the right times. I was near the back of the crowd so needed to shout loudly. It felt rather odd at first, but I soon got into the swing of it. 'Crucify!' I shouted repeatedly 'Crucify!'

And then something odd happened. The man in front of me pulled up his sleeve to read a Google Watch. I gawped. Then a man beside me began to take pictures on his phone. I saw a different man was wearing mirrored-sunglasses. I heard someone behind me talking in English. With horror, I realised that all of us in the crowd were time-tourists like myself—every single one of us. We were the ones who changed Pilate's mind: we were the crowd who helped persuade him to crucify Jesus. It was us: *we* were rooting for the death of Jesus. In fact, *I* was the reason why Jesus of Nazareth needed to die that week.

I realise that we relate the story of Holy Week to emphasise that I—and you—are the changeable and fickle people who kickstarted that first Holy Week, the week that put Jesus on the Cross.

### Let us pray

Eternal God,  
in the cross of Jesus we see the cost of sin  
and the depth of your love:  
in humble hope and fear may we place at his feet  
all that we have and all that we are,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All Amen.**

### 3 But why a cross?

At the centre of everything to do with Good Friday, everywhere we look, we see a cross, so let's look at the cross and its shape.

One of the highlights of my younger years was spending Easter with my grandfather in the tiny village of Wye near Ashford in Kent. There, every Good Friday, two teams of students from the local college hold a tug of war—a tug of war with a difference, for the teams were positioned either side of the Great Stour river which runs to the immediate west of the village. It was disastrous for the weaker team because its members not only lost the tug of war but also got very wet! The only way to stay safe was to ensure that both teams were equally matched. The rope was in tension and that tension was the same from both ends.

A tug of war is at play at the heart of the Easter story. As with everything, it's best to start with God. Our God is holy; indeed, He is so holy that many of the Jews at the time of Jesus thought that He could not mix with anything that is sinful, such as us, for it would be consumed. This God is high and lifted up. He can therefore seem remote and untouchable. We say he is *transcendent*. But this same God is also active in our world. We see him at the very beginning of the creation story in Genesis in the form of the Holy Spirit, hovering over the deep. He creates us, sustains us, enlivens us, heals us, answers prayer. In a word, he is *here*. To describe this different side of God's nature, we use a different term and say He is *immanent*. Between these two extremes of remote and present, transcendent and imminent, untouchably pure and willing to become as we are, we discern a tug-of-war: a tug-of-war played out in a vertical direction: God 'up there' and God 'down here'. Like the tug of war in Wye Village, the two teams have to be evenly matched: if God is made out to be only remote then we cannot approach Him and He cannot approach us. Prayer simply cannot happen. But if God is not irresistibly holy, then he is diminished, and becomes too 'pally'—the God who is 'my best friend. No: any God worth following needs to be both transcendent and also imminent, and at the same time. The two exist in tension, and that tension is creative.

But we are Christian people—followers of the man who was executed on a Cross. Again, as soon as we look at this Jesus, we see a tension, a tug-of-war between two different irreconcilable opposites. At once, he is Jesus the man. He was a Palestinian Jew, a peasant locked in space and time. But this Jesus is also God: he is God incarnate, literally, 'God 'en-fleshed.' This God is here, living in and among us. We discern another tug-of-war: this time played out on the earth and horizontal. And again, it's disastrous if one side loses: if we stress Jesus' humanity at the expense of his divinity, we feel free to pick and choose which of his commands we

listen to. But if he is God and not man, then what's the point? Of *course* he could live a perfect life; of *course* he was able to *talk* to God because he was God! Jesus is both God *and* man.

We see two separate tugs of war at the heart of the Christian story. A vertical tension and, at the same time, a horizontal tension. And, taken together, they describe a cross. It is on the cross that we see both Jesus the man and Jesus the God; we also see a transcendent God stooping to become imminent to the point of an immortal God dies—as the eucharistic liturgy says, 'Great is the mystery of faith'!

Returning to those two teams and their tug of war. The supporters of one team would surely cheer when its team won and the other got wet, but, the other felt diminished. The tug of war at the heart of the Christian Gospel is similar: we simply cannot let one side win; it would be a *disaster* if one side won. God is both imminent and transcendent; Jesus is both man and God. Our task is to accept it and believe it.

This tension can be creative ... if we allow it to be. But the only way to accommodate such a tension is to seek to live according to both sides of each tug-of-war. We must allow the God in whom we believe to be both God above and God down here, transcendent and imminent; we must treat Jesus as both God and man. The only way to achieve *that* is with the aid of the Holy Spirit, who fuels our faith and underwrites the many paradoxes of faith. Understanding the Cross therefore requires that we accommodate all three persons of the Trinity.

The meaning of the Cross is fathomless. We can mine it for a lifetime and still find new insights. But to even start to understand it, we need to discern these two tugs of war. They form a Cross, with Jesus as the fulcrum.

### Let us pray

Almighty and everlasting God,  
you hate nothing that you have made  
and forgive the sins of all those who are penitent:  
create and make in us new and contrite hearts  
that we, worthily lamenting our sins  
and acknowledging our wretchedness,  
may receive from you, the God of all mercy,  
perfect remission and forgiveness;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**All Amen.**

## 4 A mathematical cross

There are many other places where we see a cross being used to represent something, so it's more than a mere letter of the alphabet.

For example, all children know the phrase, 'X marks the spot' for it tells us where to find something of enormous value, for example the treasure on a pirate's map.

Then again, a cross, an 'ex', means something unknown in maths—and don't forget that the very word *mathematics* comes from the Greek *mathētas* which first meant 'discipline' and which the Bible freely borrowed when it speaks about 'disciples'.

And an X at the bottom of our schoolwork means we have made a mistake. Something is wrong. We've somehow fallen short. It could mean we go straight to the teacher or other expert who will show us the correct way of doing something. But the sight of a cross on a page points to the inescapable truth: we have erred. We didn't follow the rules.

Combining these themes, then, we see how a cross speaks about the unknown costliness of following Jesus. It tells us where to look to find salvation, and we look because the cross tells we need to amend and change. we look for salvation because we need it. The cross therefore offers us a key with which we can unlock the otherwise unknowable code of divine meaning.

That phrase from the cross, 'Look at me to find life' is almost biblical in its simple urgency, and we need to learn to look past the cross, walking beyond the physical wood, to find the way of the cross As it says in the Collect for the Third Sunday of Lent, 'Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

### Let us pray

Loving Father, as a cross on a letter signifies affection, so fill us with your love.

Loving Son, as a cross on our homework signifies something done wrongly, so heal our sin.

Loving Spirit, as a cross in a calculation signifies the unknown, so make God known through your indwelling.

**All Amen.**



## 5 The cross on a letter

There is one other place where we often see a cross. It appears (written or drawn) at the end of a letter, card, email—in fact, any missive in which the sender wants to communicate love. It's sometimes described as a 'kiss', and may appear for example as, 'love you, x x'. Either way, the cross-shape points beyond itself to love.

The cross of God Friday also speaks of profound love. Scripture abounds in choice metaphors God. He is light; he is a shepherd, he is a bushing bush, he is a consuming fire, and so on. The list is very long. But in 1 John 4 (and elsewhere) scripture tells us that God is love. His acts and precepts therefore embody love so, by extension, whatever else we may say about the cross, the spirituality of the cross must always speak of love. If a different interpretation seeps into our analyses then we need to revisit, correct, put it right, so infinite love cannot bow to anything less than love.

Humankind needs to change: it is sinful and needs redeeming. It is lost and needs redirecting. It is self-centred and needs to look beyond itself. Our task this Passiontide is to look at the cross and through it touch the love of God. Walking the way of the cross is therefore walking the way of love.

### Let us pray

O God, whose beauty is beyond our imagining  
and whose power we cannot comprehend:  
show us your glory as far as we can grasp it,  
and shield us from knowing more than we can bear  
until we may look upon you without fear;  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

**All Amen.**

## 6 Imagining ourselves on the way of the Cross: the stations

To most folk, the ‘way of the cross’ means the actual, physical progress of Jesus and his cross as described by the creed: he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

To that end, many believers today meditate using the so-called ‘Stations of the Cross’, subdividing the way of the cross into smaller, manageable episodes. There are many different versions of the Stations. The following list is the most popular:

1. Jesus is condemned to death
2. Jesus is given his cross
3. Jesus falls the first time
4. Jesus meets His Mother
5. Simon of Cyrene carries the cross
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
7. Jesus falls the second time
8. Jesus meets the daughters of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls the third time
10. Jesus is stripped of His garments
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. Jesus' body is removed from the cross
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb and covered in incense.

Some elements within this list are historical: Jesus was certainly condemned by Pilate; he *was* crucified; he *did* die. Some elements are nowhere mentioned in the Gospels but he would certainly have been stripped and it seems very likely he would have fallen several times because scripture tells of Simon of Cyrene; why else would the Romans have forced someone else to carry the wood of Jesus' cross.

Some elements could record of a memory of a real event—Mary encountering her son seems entirely likely, for example. Conversely, other elements are without a doubt fictitious. This time, think of Veronica whose name is a transliteration of *veron icon*, Greek for ‘true likeness’ and her story concerns a cloth that miraculously receives a ‘true likeness’ of Jesus' face; we are wise to infer that some confusion has occurred.

Some elements have been omitted from Jesus' journey through the streets of Jerusalem. A ritual humiliation is suggested ... for example, Jesus is stripped but forget the image from stained-glass windows of Jesus wearing nothing but a loin cloth. In fact, he would have been entirely naked. And other details are omitted entirely: the Romans would always subject a purity teacher to shame, probably at the hands of a local prostitute who also needed to be taught her place. And so on.

Although not traditionally part of the Stations, today 'the Resurrection of Jesus' is often included as a last, fifteenth station. And there are now also the stations of the resurrection, which is a very powerful series of meditations.

To summarise, this version of the list—the most popular—has stations from the Gospels but also includes stations that have appear nowhere in the Gospels It's as though the Way of the Cross needs to most be earthed somehow.

As we venerate Jesus this Good Friday, we can usefully meditate on the known truths and the likely truths, but also on the unknowns and the hypotheticals. In fact, in that respect, they can be said to follow Ignatian spirituality. We picture ourselves into a religious scene and observe our reactions to them what we 'see' in our mind's eye. It can be extremely powerful as we seek to grow in faith to picture elements that don't appear in scripture, to see how they 'spark a response' as we walk with Jesus in the way of the Cross.

### **Let us pray**

Lord of all life and power,  
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son  
overcame the old order of sin and death  
to make all things new in him:  
grant that we, being dead to sin  
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,  
may reign with him in glory;  
to whom with you and the Holy Spirit  
be praise and honour, glory and might,  
now and in all eternity.

**All Amen.**

## 7 Imagining characters from the crucifixion narrative

In a manner similar to an Ignatian reading of the Stations of the Cross, we can imagine a response by one or more of the characters from the passion narratives.

Some authors have done an excellent job of this imaginary retelling of the passion, while others don't quite achieve their aim. As someone once quipped, 'By their depiction of Jesus shall ye know them'. Perhaps we say more about ourselves and our own spiritualities than we like to let on.

One of the best known was by the artist, poet and philosopher, Kahlil Gibran who published his *Jesus: the Son of Man* in 1928. In it, he used his skilful poetic voice to imagine biblical characters in just this way. For example, imagine in the following monologue the voice of Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried Jesus' cross:

I was on my way to the fields when I saw Him carrying His cross. The multitudes were following Him so I too walked beside Him. His burden stopped Him many a time, for His body was exhausted.

Then a Roman soldier approached me, saying, 'Come, you are strong and firm built; carry the cross of this man.' When I heard these words my heart swelled within me and I was grateful.

So I carried His cross. It was heavy, for it was made of poplar soaked through with the rains of winter. Jesus looked at me. And the sweat of His forehead was running down upon His beard. Again He looked at me and He said, 'Do you too drink this cup? You shall indeed sip its rim with me to the end of time.'

So saying He placed His hand upon my free shoulder. And we walked together towards the Hill called 'The Place of the Skull'.

By now I did not feel the weight of the cross. I felt only His hand, and it was like the wing of a bird upon my shoulder.

We reached the hill top, and there they were to crucify Him. I then felt the weight of the tree. He uttered no word when they drove the nails into His hands and His feet, nor did he make any sound. His limbs did not quiver under the hammer.

It seemed as if His hands and feet had died and would only live again when bathed in blood. Yet it seemed also as if He sought the nails as the prince would seek a crown; and that He craved to be raised to the heights.

My heart did not think to pity Him, for I was too filled to wonder. Now, the man whose cross I carried has become my cross. Should they say to me again, 'Carry the cross of this man,' I would carry it till my road ended at the grave.

But I would beg Him to place His hand upon my shoulder.

This happened many years ago; and still whenever I follow the furrow in the

field, and in that drowsy moment before sleep, I think always of that wonderful Man. And I feel His winged hand, here, on my left shoulder.

Gibran imagines the voices of a many of many biblical characters. Many are well known like Mary Magdalene, but his better meditations centre round the more obscure characters such as Barabbas, Nathanael, Simon of Cyrene as here, or the Roman centurion who arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Some of these monologues are unbearably intense while others do not work so well today. But we can imagine our own, imagining ourselves as we walk with Jesus along the way of the cross.

### **Let us pray**

Almighty God, from the beginning of time,  
you have been working for the salvation of the world.  
By the strength of your right hand,  
you rescued your people from the slavery in Egypt:  
by the same power,  
set free all the peoples of the world  
from the bondage of their sins  
and make them heirs of the glories  
of your everlasting kingdom:  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All Amen**



## 8 Jesus himself speaks from the cross

The second view from the cross is quite well known in some church circles as people listened to sermons and letters purporting to come from the Lord Jesus himself. This approach was particularly popular during the Middle Ages and the number of examples is simply huge; but even later, far beyond the Reformation, writers were using the same literary device.

The so-called ‘reproaches’ follow this genre. They ‘record’ a series of statements and responses, expressing a conversation between Jesus and his people—us—as he hangs on the cross. As we listen, we hear him complain. Sometimes he sounds reproving and criticising, sometimes pleading and begging, sometimes aloof. The replies are intended to demonstrate the treachery of us, his people.

Again, this approach is ancient. They first appear in the *Pontificale* of Prudentius (846–61 AD) and gradually came into use throughout Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and were finally incorporated into the Roman rite during the fourteenth century. Cranmer considered them to represent a theology that was too Roma Catholic, so suppressed them during the Reformation and refused to incorporate them in his first Book of Common Prayer.

The reproaches are a literary and poetical way of entering the mind of Jesus himself as he hangs on the cross. This lines from the start are fairly typical: a cantor gives a reply of sorts after each sentence or so.

**All** My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me.

**Cantor** I led you out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom but you led your Saviour to the cross.

**All** My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me!  
Holy is God! Holy and strong! Holy immortal one, have mercy on us.

**Cantor** For forty years I led you to safety through the desert. I fed you with manna from heaven, and brought you to a land of plenty; but you led your Saviour to the cross.

**All** Holy is God! Holy and Strong! Holy immortal one, have mercy on us.

**Cantor** What more could I have done for you? I planted you as my fairest vine, but you yielded only bitterness. When I was thirsty, you gave me vinegar to drink, and pierced your Saviour’s side with a lance.

The very phrase ‘reproaches’ tells us all we need to know about this ancient meditation. Sometimes these words and phrases can sound manipulative or even hectoring but, taken in context, they can become a rich seam of spirituality. A

genuine faith can only grow if we allow them to become literally a voice from Jesus our Lord, ripped as it were from his throat in agony.

As a liturgical poem, we only hear the reproaches once a year on Good Friday, and then within a long and complex liturgy. But read on their own they take on a different life as we consider the genuine possibility that Jesus hung on the cross for us. Jesus' pain is excruciating, and the word 'excruciate' is the Latin for 'of the cross'. That God the Son willingly underwent this appalling pain should be a reminder of the sheer, appalling sinfulness of sin.

Listening to the reproaches is therefore a way of being with the Christ of the cross.

### **Let us pray**

Lord, you bring us into being  
and let our lives touch your heart:  
may the fragrance of our worship  
draw us closer to your open heart  
and free us from our clinging  
to the things we can control;  
through Jesus Christ, the passion of God.

**All Amen.**

## 9 Interrogating the cross itself: the *Dream of the Rood*

There is one more permutation available imagining oneself on the way of the cross. This time, we hear the cross itself speaking to us.

Perhaps the classic examples of this form of piety is an Anglo Saxon poem, *The Dream of the Rood* (where 'rood' is an old English word for cross). Scholars today consider it to be one of the greatest of the small handful of poems that have survived from so turbulent an era.

In this long poem, the cross itself becomes a character in the passion narrative. Most of the time, the cross speaks of Jesus in the third person but very occasionally the voice who speaks is that of Jesus himself. Either way, he interrogates us as bystanders at the dreadful scene of crucifixion. The monk who wrote the 'Dream of the Rood' may have known the Reproaches, but scholars think it unlikely. In truth, we simply do not know.

The poem is extremely powerful and, through its rather unexpected viewpoint, gives us yet another way of looking at the way of the cross. It starts with a bang:

Listen! I will speak of the sweetest dream,  
what came to me in the middle of the night,  
when speech-bearers slept in their rest.  
It seemed that I saw a most wondrous tree  
raised on high, wound round with light,  
the brightest of beams.

The scene is obviously profound and beautiful:

All the angels of the Lord looked on;  
fair through all eternity; that was no felon's gallows,  
but holy spirits beheld him there,  
men over the earth and all this glorious creation.

Like all uses of the imagination, the apparent glory makes the viewer repent:

Wondrous was the victory-tree, and I was stained by sins,  
wounded with guilt ... I began to see  
an ancient wretched struggle, when it first began  
to bleed on the right side. I was all beset with sorrows,

The poem follows in the classic Anglo Saxon mould, so its highly alliterative to help memorising and to grab the attention. (This aspect is almost impossible to convey in a modern translation.) But it is allusive too:

I beheld in sorrow the Saviour's tree  
until I heard it utter a sound;  
that best of woods began to speak words:  
'It was so long ago--I remember it still--  
that I was felled from the forest's edge,  
ripped up from my roots. Strong enemies seized me there,  
made me their spectacle, made me bear their criminals;  
they bore me on their shoulders and then set me on a hill,  
enemies enough fixed me fast.

The intention is to evoke pity and reconsider the effect of our sin and the sheer cost of our salvation:

I was reared as a cross: I raised up the mighty King,  
the Lord of heaven; I dared not lie down.  
They drove dark nails through me; the scars are still visible,  
open wounds of hate; I dared not harm any of them.  
They mocked us both together; I was all drenched with blood  
flowing from that man's side after he had sent forth his spirit.

It's a long poem but it repays our meditating on its ancient words. After several hundred lines, it ends on a note of joyful hope:

He who here on earth once suffered  
on the hanging-tree for human sin;  
He ransomed us and gave us life,  
a heavenly home. Hope was renewed  
with cheer and bliss for those who were burning there.  
The Son was successful in that journey,  
mighty and victorious, when he came with a multitude,  
a great host of souls, into God's kingdom,  
the one Ruler almighty, the angels rejoicing  
and all the saints already in heaven  
dwelling in glory, when almighty God,  
their Ruler, returned to his rightful home.

As we walk the way of the cross, we realise that we can speak to the cross itself, but in a sacramental way, we can speak to any aspect of this ancient story, so long as we allow it to point beyond itself to the God of love who yearns for our salvation.

**Let us pray**

Lord, you let us convert you  
into currency and commodity  
so that you can pay the price  
beyond all accounting:  
may we offer our misused powers to you  
knowing that you can transform them,  
knowing that even this betrayal is still a kiss:  
through Jesus Christ,  
the passion of God.

**All Amen.**



## 10 What's the historical 'way of the cross'?

Jewish insurrections occurred frequently during the years immediately before and after Jesus. From ancient literary sources we know that tens of thousands of people were crucified across the Roman Empire, including in occupied Britain. In Palestine alone, that figure ran into the thousands. No wonder Jesus spoke of crucifixion ('take up your cross', for example) and never thought it necessary to explain the term.

These thoughts can inform our responses to the cross and to Jesus' execution. The Romans had preferred places of execution. One was a rubbish dump outside Jerusalem known as Golgotha—a Hebraism of 'Place of the skull'. It was close to the capital but not large. The other preferred option was the long road linking the wilderness of the Judean desert with Jerusalem. On at least one occasion, the Romans placed a dying man at intervals along this long road, calling it, 'the way of the cross'. It seems very likely that Jesus and his disciples would have passed along this road lined with the dead and dying; it bears consideration if he was thinking of this long road when he was talking about, 'the way of the cross'.

And let's think about the history of the cross itself, the actual piece of timber through which the salvation of the world was achieved. God knew that one unique seed from one individual Palestinian tree would one day fall to the ground, germinate, and thence grow to become a tall tree of beautifully-grained wood. A Roman administrator would have command that impressed Palestinian labour cut down the tree. That labour involved local men—carpenters—being supervised by the hated regional superpower, scrutinised closely as they transformed the raw beauty of a tree into a savage means of execution. It's possible that Jesus himself and his carpenter father would have been forced at spearpoint to work at making crosses in this way. At least one of the medieval mystics wondered aloud if Jesus had made his own cross. This history is, then, the way of (one, at least) cross.

### Let us pray

Almighty God,  
whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain,  
and entered not into glory before he was crucified:  
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,  
may find it none other than the way of life and peace;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**All Amen.**

## 11 We walk in the way of the cross.

Jesus tells us that we must walk the way of the cross. For example, in Mark's Gospel we read, 'He called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.' He's talking to us: he's commanding that we put self to death. The only guarantee of eternal life is radical repentance. As the old saying goes, 'If we die before we die, we will not die when we do die'.

He also demands that we walk the way of *his* cross, not just walking in his footsteps but slipstreaming because it's not possible to live the lives of holiness and purity he demands unless his power lives in us. Stated differently, we can only attain heaven because he first joined earth with heaven.

### Let us pray

God of glory,  
by the raising of your Son  
you have broken the chains of death and hell:  
fill your Church with faith and hope;  
for a new day has dawned  
and the way to life stands open  
in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

**All Amen.**