

Thursday 14 September 2023

Holy Cross Day



The cross on which our Lord was crucified has become the universal symbol for Christianity. It replaced the fish symbol of the early church, though the latter has been revived somewhat in recent times.

After the end of the persecution era, early in the fourth century, pilgrims began to travel to Jerusalem to visit and pray at the places associated with the life of Jesus. One of them was Helena, the mother of the first Christian emperor, Constantine the great. While helping to oversee excavations in the city, Helena said to have uncovered a cross, which many at the time believed to be the true Cross of Christ. A basilica was built on the site of the Holy Sepulchre and dedicated on this day in the year 335 AD.

Sermon © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

Bible readings © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration are included at the end.

The hymn can be accessed via a YouTube link. Please click on the links.

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

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

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 Lift high the Cross

(please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Christ himself carried up our sins in his body to the tree,
so that, free from sins,
we might live for righteousness;
by his wounds we have been healed.
Let us confess our sins.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,
Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The Collect for Holy Cross Day

Almighty God,
who in the passion of your blessed Son
made an instrument of painful death
to be for us the means of life and peace:
grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ
that we may gladly suffer for his sake;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the Third book of Moses called Numbers

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Numbers 21:4-9

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

First reading

A reading from the Book of Psalms

You who fear the Lord, praise him!

All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

For he did not despise or abhor

the affliction of the afflicted;

he did not hide his face from me,

but heard when I cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;

my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied;

those who seek him shall praise the Lord.

May your hearts live for ever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember

and turn to the Lord;

and all the families of the nations

shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord,

and he rules over the nations.

Psalm 22:23-28

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Jesus, though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,

but emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:6–11

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Majesty, worship His majesty ([click on this link to hear the hymn](#))

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All Glory to you O Lord.

No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

‘Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

John 3:13–17

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Today is Holy Cross Day. On this day in the Church calendar, it is common to look at the Cross and ponder its meaning, looking at our own responses to Jesus' suffering and death.

The subject is huge—so colossal, in fact, that it is fathomless and requires a lifetime of prayerful meditation. And the image of Jesus' death being a perfect, atoning sacrifice is so common it's possible to know it too well and therefore forget it. This offering therefore centres around the much-loved and well-known hymn, *There is a green hill far away* which explores a great many different ways of looking at the Cross and what it implies.

There are several versions with minor 'tweaks' in its wording, so the numbers in the following discussion relate to the line numbers in the version below.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. There is a green hill far away | 9. He died that we might be forgiven; |
| 2. Outside a city wall | 10. He died to make us good, |
| 3. Where the dear Lord was crucified, | 11. That we might go at last to Heaven, |
| 4. Who died to save us all. | 12. Saved by his precious blood. |
| 5. We may not know, we cannot tell, | 13. There was no other good enough |
| 6. What pains he had to bear, | 14. To pay the price of sin; |
| 7. But we believe it was for us | 15. He only could unlock the gate |
| 8. He hung and suffered there. | 16. Of Heaven, and let us in. |
| 17. O dearly, dearly, has he loved, | |
| 18. And we must love him too; | |
| 19. And trust in his redeeming blood | |
| 20. And try his works to do. | |

In the conventional model of an **atonement sacrifice** in the Old Testament, the high Priest laid his hands on the head of an animal without blemish and prayed that sins be transferred to it. He then killed the animal and daubed its blood in a ritualistic manner. Similarly, the sins of all mankind were taken up by Jesus and/or placed on him by God the Father, and he was then slain. One idea concerning the moment at which the sins were relocated is the instant in Gethsemane when Jesus asked that the 'cup' might be passed from him (Mt 26:39)—an echo of Psalm 75:8 which presents an image of drinking in sins. Similarly, when Jesus was looking ahead to his forthcoming suffering, he also spoke in terms of a 'cup' (Mt 10:22).

Lines 6 and 7 relate to Jesus' bearing our sins, with the attendant pain of separation from God. The references to 'blood' in line 12 occurs straight after 'making us good' in line 10 and is echoed in line 19 as 'redeeming blood'. This emphatic dwelling on blood reinforces the idea that Jesus is killed as an 'atonement lamb' 'to make us good'. In effect, line 10 becomes the pivot about which the hymn revolves.

Anselm's idea of atonement is different insofar as God can seem remote and almost tyrannical: the sin of mankind is so heinous that reparation is vital. The penalty due because of our sin was so great that no man could atone for his own sins: the price would be simply too high. Accordingly, Jesus—as God yet man, sinless yet human—paid the price for us. It is easy within this simple idea to suggest that Jesus was our personalised whipping boy. It is nevertheless true that the price paid was overwhelming; and that our reward for following God—eternal life in Heaven—is a free and unwarranted gift, explaining why *justification* can only occur through grace.

Anselm's idea can easily be misinterpreted to the point that it is sometimes called **penal substitution**. Anselm was adamant concerning the impossibility of God being unjust (because God is absolute in terms of justice). But in Anselm's theory, reparation was necessary and Jesus paid a price for sins for which he, personally, could not have been held responsible. Line 13 clearly states this Anselmian view when it says, 'There was no other good enough *to pay the price* of sin'.

Abelard was another Medieval theologian. He questioned Anselm's interpretation because it made God appear both unjust and unloving. Instead, as a demonstration of *self-giving* love, it was God himself who paid the price for sin. Jesus' incarnation became the inevitable result of God's love for, without God as man paying the price, it would not have been possible for the price to be paid in *full*. Abelard's theory allows for a more loving God, in line with Jn 3:16: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him will not perish, but have everlasting life'. This is true love to the extent of **reparation**: 'greater love hath no man, than that he lay down his life for his friends' (Jn 15:13).

But if Anselm's theory casts God as a tyrant demanding justice, then Abelard's picture can become almost too cosy and has sometimes been labelled as 'salvation on the cheap': if pushed, his model suggests that we ourselves need pay nothing whatsoever; and Jesus, because he is also God, limits the extent of the price paid, as people ponder 'If part of God died, then perhaps it didn't hurt him much'. Justification without sanctification can be bland and received ungratefully.

Lines 15 and 16 are Abelardian in terms of Jesus opening his own home, heaven, for us, which emphasises how Jesus is God. Line 17 extends the theme by stressing God's love. (In terms of the grammar of the hymn, the 'he' and 'him' in lines 17 and 18 probably mean Jesus, but the context of atonement—in any form—requires God behind it.

A more modern view of atonement is that of the **classic theory**, in which Abelard's and Anselm's ideas are eclipsed by an altogether greater theme as Jesus conquers evil. This idea was first expressed by Aulen, but becomes unsatisfactory when Jesus is made to appear as manipulating God the Father; but the idea is otherwise central to the whole idea that Jesus did not act out of expediency or on a whim—or indeed out of a misunderstood response to God's will—but because his sacrifice was *necessary* as the price for human sin.

This view is implicit in the hymn insofar as we are made clean owing to Jesus' crucifixion. Line 10—we are made 'good'—is a case in point here.

But in a more mature and multi-faceted approach, we take elements from each of these models. If God loves us, then surely a response to that love is required. After all, Jesus came to save us because we too have fallen short and have sinned (Romans 3:23). Jesus paid the price for our sin both because God asked him to (cf. Anselm) and because Jesus is God (so God pays the price also, cf. Abelard). But in defeating the devil (cf. the Classic Theory), we ourselves are empowered to make reparation. We too can die and rise again; and having been baptised just as Jesus was, we too are baptised into his death (Romans 6:3). The implication is inevitable: while the price has been paid, we must repent and follow Jesus, and—dying to self—become Christ-like. Our sanctification is a response to his act which enables justification.

The atoning power of Jesus occurs at God's initiative, but we must respond to that initiative. And our **response** can only be one of **love**, the fruit of which is repentance. The hymn's conclusion (lines 18–20) clearly embodies this point that we must be transformed into Christlikeness.

So, in summary, the hymn abounds in complementary ways of looking at Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the first Good Friday. Although Jesus' death occurred on a single day in history, its influence permeates the Christian lives we live today. We respond to Jesus' eternal love while imprisoned within time—and receive eternal salvation.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray to the Father through his Son,
who suffered on the cross for the world's redemption.

Fill with your Spirit Christ's broken body, the Church ...

Give to Christian people everywhere a deep longing to take up the cross and to
understand its mysterious glory.

By the Saviour's cross and passion,

All Lord, save us and help us.

Bless those who lead the Church's worship ...

In the preaching of the word
and the celebration of the sacraments,
draw your people close to you.

By the Saviour's cross and passion,

All Lord, save us and help us.

Give your grace to those who preach your word to the nations ...
Help us to witness to the faith we have received
by our words and in our deeds,
and daily conform us more and more to Christ,
that we may glory in his cross.

By the Saviour's cross and passion,

All Lord, save us and help us.

Look in your mercy upon the world you loved so much
that you sent your Son to suffer and to die ...
Strengthen those who work to share
the reconciliation won at such a cost upon the cross.

By the Saviour's cross and passion,

All Lord, save us and help us.

Bring healing by the wounds of Christ
to all who are weighed down by pain and injustice ...
Help the lonely and the betrayed, the suffering and the dying,
to find strength in the companionship of Jesus,
and in his passion to know their salvation.

By the Saviour's cross and passion,

All Lord, save us and help us.

Welcome into paradise all who have left this world in your friendship ...
According to your promises,
bring them with all your saints
to share in the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection.

By the Saviour's cross and passion,

**All Lord, save us and help us.
Holy God, holy and strong,
holy and immortal,
have mercy on us.**

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Once we were far off,
but now in union with Christ Jesus we have been brought near
through the shedding of Christ's blood,
for he is our peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Be still, my soul

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

Christ crucified draw you to himself,
to find in him a sure ground for faith,
a firm support for hope,
and the assurance of sins forgiven;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

HYMN 4 Crown him with many crowns

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right and good,

our duty and our joy,

always and everywhere to give you thanks,

holy Father, almighty and eternal God,

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Today we celebrate with songs of praise

the cross, the victory-sign of Christ.

Once through the fruit of the forbidden tree we fell,

now through this tree our Saviour cancels all our sin.

An instrument of shameful death

has become for Christ a throne of glory.

The power of the life-giving cross

reveals the judgement that has come upon the world

and the triumph of Christ crucified.

And so, with choirs of angels

and with all the heavenly host,

we proclaim your glory

and join their unending hymn of praise:

All Holy, holy, holy Lord,

God of power and might,

heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

We praise and bless you, loving Father,

through Jesus Christ, our Lord;

and as we obey his command,

send your Holy Spirit,

that broken bread and wine outpoured

may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Faithful God,
whose Son bore our sins in his body on the tree
and gave us this sacrament to show forth his death until he comes:
give us grace to glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,
for he is our salvation, our life and our hope,
who reigns as Lord, now and for ever.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.