

## St James' Church, Weybridge

**Holy Cross Sunday, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

Today's readings:      Philippians 2: 6-11  
                                  John 3: 13-17

The cross on which Jesus our Lord and Saviour died, has become the universal symbol for Christianity, in many instances replacing the fish symbol of the early church, though there has been a revival of use of the fish in recent decades. Crucifixion was a punishment for capital crimes in the first-century Roman Empire. It was horrendous, with individuals put to death as a warning to others.

Jesus was not the only person crucified. Such barbaric acts have been repeated throughout history, even today. Yet His death achieved something quite extraordinary. Jesus atoned for sin because it was the death of the perfectly obedient God-made-man, the new Adam, the one without sin.

Our collect for today, the prayer that literally ‘collects’ all our thoughts together, teaches us to *“glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer for his sake.”* But it seems a strange thing for us to be asked to do, to glory in the cross.

On this day of celebration of Holy Cross, how can we glory in such a fated piece of creation, the wood of the cross of death, the murder weapon that killed God’s only begotten son?

We could start by thinking about who Jesus is, God’s son, part of the Trinity of love, God’s re-creation. He hangs on the cross with his arms open wide in embrace. Even from the cross, Jesus draws the whole world to himself in forgiveness and reconciliation. From that place of unimaginable suffering, he forgives the penitent thief and promises paradise. In this moment in time and space, humanity and God are united together – this one moment, as

Jesus calls all to come to him. His mother Mary also witnesses this embrace of love, as she stands at the foot of the cross, again, filled with overwhelming love for her Son.

St Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians, that Jesus, *“humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.”* Obedience is an important word for Christians, even if today an unfashionable one. Our Lord is compliant, he submits to human authority and his fate. And he does so for the sake others not himself.

He dies for us, for all people and their relationship with God. And in this one-moment, God knows what it is like to live and die, to suffer and grieve, to love and to lose.

St Paul reminds us that Jesus is the suffering servant, a point that is emphasised by the German theologian and martyr of the Second

World War, Bonhoeffer, when he wrote that *'Only a suffering God can help us.'* He knew all too well about suffering, as he wrote his letters of love from prison.

The cross teaches us something more about God-made-man. It points to a knowledge that God gains about us, humanity, in the fullest sense. God suffering, experiencing the full emotions of human existence, including rejection, humiliation, and death.

Consequently, God knows. Yes, hear that again. God knows. Today in the face of our sufferings, Jesus walks with us in love and compassion.

The cross does not simply speak to us of suffering, but also of love. The cross is both a murder weapon, and a door to salvation – just like the wood of a door that opens into a new room, so the wood of the cross is our door to a new relationship with God. That is what Jesus

accomplishes for us, through his death upon the cross, the opportunity and promise of new life. God with us does this for us, as God longs to reconcile all people to himself.

St Paul continues in his letter to the Philippians, *“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.”*

We too have crosses to bear and they come in different shapes and sizes, some are obvious, some are hidden from sight, and we may try and keep them hidden from others, as an act of humility, or denial or even self-preservation. But from time to time, the pain of carrying our own cross is just too much to bear, and indeed, we cannot bear the weight of our cross, alone.

Jesus who loves us so much, longs to help us. Our Lord of life and love opens his arms wide

in embrace and welcomes each one of us into his kingdom. We simply need to trust Jesus. This community of St James must always be a place where people glimpse the kingdom to come, a place where all are reconciled in love. At St James' we must help each other carry our own crosses as we *"take up our cross and follow Christ"* into his Kingdom.

We do this by our concern for one another and through our worship together, our bending of the knee before Jesus our Lord, as we stand, like Mary the mother of our Lord at the foot of the cross.

In this we demonstrate our obedience to Christ, our commitment to worship, to study God's word and to share the sacraments.

God's love is poured out for us from the cross.

Jesus has suffered and knows what it is like to feel rejected, to experience bereavement, to suffer for the sake of others.

That is the mystery of Holy Cross. Let the cross of Christ be your strength. May Christ's loving embrace bring you comfort, as you walk the way of faith, carrying your own cross. Amen.