

Holy Cross Evensong – Sermon 2026

Philippians 2: 6-11

John 3: 13-17

Sermon

May my words be in the name of God, creator, redeemer and sustainer. Amen.

Please be seated.

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.

Tertullian wrote, just 200 years after Jesus that, 'at every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes... in all the ordinary customs of everyday life we trace the sign of the cross.'

The Collect for Holy Cross, the prayer that literally 'collects' all our thoughts together, implores 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.

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?

Let us start by thinking about Jesus himself on the cross. He hangs there with his arms outstretched. His hands pointing outwards, yet his arms open in an embrace.

Even from the cross, Jesus embraces the world. Even from that place of death, his arms are open in love for you and I.

Humanity and God are united together in this one moment, as Jesus opens his arms wide in love and 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, in love for her Son. Jesus in humility accepts death, death on a cross.

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.

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 we wrote that 'Only a suffering God can help us.' The cross then is our tool for salvation, as it brings humanity and God together in one moment of suffering.

That was not the end of the story, and so Paul continues, '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.'

So, the cross doesn't simply speak to us of suffering, but also of love. It is not simply a murder weapon, but also 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.

In life we too have crosses to bear also. They come in many different shapes and sizes. Some we are able to disguise very nicely, hiding them from the sight of others.

Sometimes we keep our cross-hidden as an act of humility. 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.

But Jesus who loves us so much can help us. By trusting in the Christian faith, Holy, Catholic and apostolic, we can share in both a community of love, and God's love poured out for us.

A community of faith, this place of St James' Church, is where people can help each other to carry their cross. 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 at the foot of the cross.

But secondly, 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. Let the cross of Christ be your strength.

So may we glory in the cross of Christ that we may gladly suffer for his sake and allow Christ's loving embrace to comfort, forgive and love us, as we walk the way of faith, carrying our own cross. Amen.

Fr Damian Harrison-Miles.