

A service of worship for use at home
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Passion Sunday April 3rd 2022

Nottingham North East
Methodist Circuit

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Theme: Passion Sunday: The Cross

Introductory prayers:

Lord, whose touchstone is the desert and the cross,
Draw near with your ancient strength,
Which we experience but do not understand,
Know, but never see.

Accompany us throughout the weeks of Lent,
That we may face the demons, fantasies and fears which accompany us; so that, by journeying
with Jesus in the desert places, we may, by your mercy,
Renew our commitment to the life of Christ
And our vocation to the way of the cross

Hymn: As the deer pants for the water

1 As the deer pants for the water,
So my soul longs after you.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship you.

*(Chorus) You alone are my strength, my
shield,
To you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship you.*

I want you more than gold or silver,
Only you can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy giver
And the apple of my eye.

Chorus

3 You're my friend and you are my brother,
Even though you are a King.
I love you more than any other,
So much more than anything.

Chorus

www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBppKZ0eJIQ

Prayers of Adoration and Praise:

We give you thanks gracious Lord,
That your wisdom is greater than ours,
Your son turned the world upside down,
And challenged the ways of human beings with your divine grace.

**He rode on a donkey, although He came as a King.
He went to the poor, although He was the Lord.
He healed the sick whilst accepting suffering and death.
He died on the cross, although He had never sinned.
He rose again, overcoming our death with life.**

We give thanks that your love is greater than ours.
Your son was greeted as Messiah,
But soon rejected and reviled by the same people.

In love He guided the disciples and prepared them for the future

In love He entered the city and the Temple.

In love He shared His knowledge of the Father.

In love He accepted the way of the Cross.

In love He did not condemn those who crucified him.

All these things fill us with wonder.

They seem such a contrast with the ways of the world - our ways;

We give you thanks Lord that these were your ways.

We give you thanks Lord that you continue to surprise us. **AMEN.**

The Lord's prayer

Hymn: Lead us heavenly Father Lead us

1 Lead us heavenly father, lead us
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
For we have no help but thee;
Yet possessing every blessing
If our God our Father be.

2 Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
All our weakness thou dost know,
Thou didst tread this earth before us,
Thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,
Through the desert thou didst go.

3 Spirit of our God, descending,
Fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
Love with every passion blending,
Pleasure that can never cloy;
Thus provided, pardoned, guided
Nothing can our peace destroy.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpkEeXWtWg0&t=6s

Readings: John 12:27-33

(Jesus speaks of His death)"Now my heart is troubled - and what shall I say? Shall I say 'Father, do not let this hour come upon me'? But that is why I came - so that I might go through this hour of suffering. Father bring glory to your name!" Then a voice spoke from heaven, "I have brought glory to it, and I will do so again".

The crowd standing there heard the voice, and some of them said it was thunder, while others said, "an angel spoke to Him!"

But Jesus said to them "It was not for my sake that the voice spoke, but for yours. Now is the time for this world to be judged; now the ruler of this world will be overthrown. When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me." (In saying this He indicated the kind of death He was going to suffer.)

Isaiah 42:1-7

The Lord says "Here is my servant, whom I strengthen, the one whom I have chosen, with whom I am well pleased.

I have filled Him with my Spirit, and He will bring justice to every nation.

He will not shout or raise His voice or make loud speeches in the streets.

He will not break off a bent reed or put out a flickering lamp.

He will bring lasting justice to all.

He will not lose hope or courage; He will establish justice on the earth.

Distant lands eagerly wait for His teaching."

God created the heavens and stretched them out;

He fashioned the earth and all that lives there;

He gave life and breath to all people.

And now the Lord says to His servant,

"I the Lord called you and given you power to see that justice is done on the earth.

Through you I will make a covenant with all peoples; through you I will bring light to the nations.

You will open the eyes of the blind and set free those who sit in dark prisons."

Sermon

I wonder how many of you wear a cross? Getting on for nearly 2000 years this has been the symbol of the Christian faith. As Protestants we tend to go for the plain cross: we associate the crucifix with the Catholic or Orthodox churches with the figure of Christ on the cross. However, the fifth Sunday in Lent is traditionally, the Sunday when we look particularly at what Jesus accomplished on the cross. This is Passion Sunday and for a short while we are asked to set aside what we know happens next - the resurrection, the ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost - and for a while just consider the cross. After all, the disciples didn't know what happened next. Jesus did try to explain what He was going to face, but they ignored it or perhaps didn't understand.

I asked you at the beginning how many of you wear a cross. If you don't wear one, I expect you have a cross somewhere in the house. I wear a wooden Franciscan cross and I have a number of other crosses - there is one standing on my mantelpiece, and I have three prayer crosses. Yet we probably don't think that in the Roman Empire a cross was a symbol of disgrace. It was where criminals, escaped slaves and terrorists ended up.

So, what do you say when people ask you what Jesus accomplished on the cross? Well, the creeds don't help much. They were written down to stop people believing the wrong things and making mistakes - but what do the creeds say?

'Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Died and was buried.

The Third day He rose again.

He ascended into heaven.'

That is not a lot of help if you are trying to work out what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Some later creeds add 'Jesus died for us men and for our salvation'. Again, not a lot of help in answering the question 'how'.

However.....

On two occasions, Jesus Himself gives us a different picture to explain the Cross - and to my mind a simpler one to understand. Read again John 12:32 and 3:14-15.

At the very beginning of His ministry and here, just days before His death when He anticipated the coming suffering with terror, He speaks of being lifted up on the Cross and drawing people to Him.

What Jesus wanted most of all was that people would turn to Him, turn away from their sin, their bondage and darkness and find forgiveness. Rather than being terrified into the Kingdom with a vision of Hell Jesus wants to attract us into His Kingdom through love. This is the picture we see of God in The Prodigal Son. Here we see longing, forgiveness and open arms.

How is this accomplished by the Cross? If, as we believe, Jesus is God, the Cross shows us vividly, just how far God is prepared to go to win our love.

By coming into a sinful world, Jesus, who was without sin, was bound to face opposition. It was inevitable that He would die - He could have saved Himself - and He wanted to - He did not need to give His life but, out of love, He could not leave us in darkness. Jesus chose the way of suffering and dying, in His own words to "draw all people to Himself"

This way of looking at the Cross is known as 'Moral Influence'

Throughout the ages men and women have seen the suffering of Jesus on the Cross and been attracted to Him. It was the suffering Jesus who first attracted me. When we know just how much we are loved, then we are able to respond with love which is just what Jesus wants more than anything else.

One of the arguments that are used against this way of looking at the Cross is that it emphasises the love of God and forgets all about God's righteousness and judgement. But if we look back to the passage we started with we find these words "now is the judgement of the world".

There is no doubt that Jesus was no 'gentle Jesus meek and mild'. He called scribes and Pharisees 'Vipers and whited sepulchres!' He hated sin and all the consequences of it. He made it plain that judgement was to come - but before the judgement, His aim was to win as many as possible - and one way was to show them how much they are loved and there is nothing like being loved to encourage love in return.

So, I come back to my question. If you were asked, by a non church person, what does the Cross mean, what's it all about? What would you say? Would you use the language of sacrifice, penal substitution, redemption or sacrificial love?

What resonates with you? How do you respond to the suffering of Jesus on the Cross?

Story 'The Good King' by Amy le Feuvre in Wisdom Stories collected by Margaret Silf

There was once a very good king who lived in a beautiful country, where the sun was always shining and the people were always happy. There was a river that ran around his country, and on the other side of it was a country that was completely different! It had hardly any sun, a great deal of rain and cold wind, and a wicked, cruel king who made everybody miserable.

So, the good king built a bridge over the river and asked the unhappy people to come over the bridge and live with him. The strange thing was that the people didn't want to come. They said that they couldn't find the bridge, that it was too much trouble to go across and that some of them lived too far away from it to find it.

So, one day the king sent three of his servants over to show the people the way and to tell them about the happy country how to find it. Two of the servants had great talent; the third thought herself very stupid, but she loved her king and told him she would do her best.

The first servant went into the unhappy country and began to sing to the people. She had a beautiful voice, and wherever she went people gathered in crowds to hear her. She sang of the king and the happy country over the bridge, and as she sang the people felt that they wanted to go there. But sometimes when she stopped singing, the people stopped wanting to go. And some only cared for her voice and not for her message.

The second servant reached more people than the first, because she wrote her message, and she had a wonderful pen. Far away people read her letters and her writing, and they liked them, for she was given the power to touch their hearts.

But, sometimes she altered the message a little to please the people more and the way across the bridge to the beautiful country was not mentioned so often; sometimes it was nearly hidden altogether, and the people thought they could make their own county as nice as the other one, without bothering to go over the bridge. But she wrote on and the singer sang on and both were trying to obey their king.

And the stupid servant? Ah, the third servant! She couldn't sing and she couldn't write, and she couldn't reach very many people. But her heart was full of love for her king, and so she talked about him to everyone who would listen to her. She wasn't clever, but she said a word here and a word there, and she always kept pointing to the bridge. Little children found their way easily when she took them by the hand and led them there.

Old men and women leant on her arm and hobbled slowly towards it. She would whisper softly to the weeping ones, she would explain slowly to the stupid ones and everyone listened to her because they said she was so simple and clear and didn't confuse them. She only knew one bridge and always pointed to it and talked of the good king.

By and by, the king called his servants home. When they came back he called together all those whom the servants had shown the way. The singer was met by a small number of people who told her that they had found their way to the bridge by her singing.

The writer was also met by a small number of people, who, far away had read her message, and had been guided to the bridge by it. But the little stupid servant was surrounded by a crowd! Her halting words had brought more over to the beautiful country than the wonderful messages of the clever ones.

The king smiled at the stupid little servant and said 'The singer has done well, and so has the writer, but the little speaker has done best of all as her message was full of love'.

A time of quiet reflection: What made the third servant so different?
Does this help us to understand what Jesus accomplished on the cross?

Meditation: Love hurts - Love wins

Body twisted,
Back torn,
Face disfigured,
Dead weight,
Cold grave,
Corruption:

Love Hurts

No light,
No hope,
Just death:
Do we live, only to die?

Love hurts

Cast aside,
Rejected, deserted,
Misunderstood,
Loneliness,
Beaten, depressed:

Love hurts

Lord, you chose the way of love,
Carrying pain and death:
I choose love.....and sometimes,

Love Hurts

Bright dawn,
New life,
Hope restored,
Stone rolled,
Empty grave:

Love wins

Pain banished,
Tears dried,
Relationships restored,
End of fear,
Eternal life

Love wins

Warmth,
Security,
Arms open wide,
Meeting again
Love wins

Lord, you chose the way of love,
Bringing life, light and salvation:
I choose love.....and ultimately,
Love Wins

A Prayer of confession:

Lord, for the way we have hurt people with cruel words, unkind gossip and criticism,
Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Lord, for our jealousy and envy of what others have whilst forgetting to be grateful for all that we have

Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Lord, for our selfishness which keeps everything for ourselves and forgets the needs of others,
Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Lord, for our indifference to the needs of people we meet, especially those who are sick, hungry, lonely or sad,

Forgive us Lord, forgive

Lord, for keeping quiet when we see violence, pain and injustice in this world,
Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Lord, being halfhearted in our witness to the gospel and acting as though we do not know you,
Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Lord, for ignoring your voice of conscience which speaks to us when we go wrong,
Forgive us Lord, forgive.

Prayers of Intercession:

Lord, we pray in resurrection hope for your world.

We pray for the voice of conscience crying in the wilderness:

For the lone voice speaking out in the babble of indifference and neglect:

For those in danger because they speak out, exposing injustice:

And for the Church, speaking to the world.

(We pray for peace and Justice in this world.....We pray especially today for the people of Ukraine.....)

We pray for our brothers and sisters in the faith who live with persecution and who live in fear.....

We pray for those whose lives have been turned upside down - because of natural disaster
Or because of civil unrest.....)

Lord hear us

Lord graciously hear us

May this time of Lent be a time of sacrifice:

And the making sacred of each moment, hour and day:

And the making holy of relationships,

In the way of Jesus Christ our Lord.

(We pray for the mission and ministry of the church in this world.....)

We pray for the spiritual health of the church....

Its worship and prayer life....

We pray for the mission, ministry and worship in our church.....)

We pray for the Lent material 'Searching for the Sacred in the Secular'

Lord hear us:

Lord graciously hear us.

May this time of Lent be a time of self examination;

A time of reaching out to those in need;

Of being examples of Kingdom people in an uncaring world

And the making holy of each hour and each day.

(We pray for those we know who are in need.....)

Those who grieve.....especially for those who have lost loved ones.....

Those who are sick in body or mind..... we think of those with mental health problems or who live alone with no one to speak to.....we pray for the mental health group starting at Phoenix Farm)

Lord hear us:

Lord graciously hear us. Amen

Final hymn: Now the green blade rises

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,

Wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;

Love lives again, that with the dead has been:

(Chorus) Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

In the grave they laid him, Love who had been slain,

Thinking that He never would awake again,

Laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen

Chorus

Forth He came at Easter, like the risen grain,
He that had for three days in the grave had lain,
Quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:

Chorus

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
Then your touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:

Chorus

www.youtube.com/watch?v=En28Je8ehDs

The Blessing:

The Lord who conquered darkness with light,
Grant us peace.

The Lord who conquered death with life,
Grant us peace.

The Lord who conquered loneliness with love,
Grant us peace.

May the Lord's blessing go with us this day and
always.

Amen