



**SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE**  
**in the City of New York**  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
**www.SaintThomasChurch.org**

**Sunday, September 15, 2019**  
*The Feast of the Holy Cross*

*Solemn Evensong*  
*at 4:00 p.m.*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Alison J. Turner,  
*Director of Children and Family Ministry*  
on  
Genesis 3:1-15 and 1 Peter 3:17-22  
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### **We Send to the Cross of Christ**

I recently unpacked my Confirmation Bible and flicking through the pages came across prayer cards from holy places that I remember visiting as a child. One such prayer card features *Christ of Saint John of the Cross* - a painting by Salvador Dalí from 1951. It shows Jesus Christ on the cross in a darkened sky floating over a body of water complete with a boat and fishermen. Although it is a depiction of the crucifixion, it is devoid of nails, blood, and a crown of thorns so one might think that the depth of power in the pain of the cross can be passed by. That is until I turn it over and read,

*Lo There He hangs—ashened figure  
pinned against the wood.  
God grant that I could love Him  
as I really should.  
I draw a little closer  
to share that Love divine  
and almost hear Him whisper  
“Ah, foolish child of Mine!  
If I should now embrace you,  
My hands would stain you red.  
And if I leaned to whisper,  
the Thorns would pierce your head.”  
Then I knew in meekness  
that love demands a price  
’Twas then I learned that sorrow  
’tis but the Kiss of Christ.*

Caryll Houselander's poem "To Christ Crucified" is a powerful reminder of God's yearning to be close to us in times of suffering and as well as joy.

Last Wednesday, September 11, people were gathering all over the world in a spirit of remembrance and compassion. At around 8.30am builders neighboring the church stopped their work to listen to the live 9/11 interfaith memorial ceremony being broadcast from downtown. As they stood silently together in the high-viz jackets and hard hats, they created a vision of brightness on 53<sup>rd</sup> street as they drew in closer to listen to the haunting drum rolls and, seemingly, never-ending roll call of the fallen of 9/11, and to remember those that continue to carry the pain of that tragic day 18 years ago especially the first responders and those who helped clear the site and have life-threatening illnesses because of it.

Simultaneous with this ceremony people were finding their way into church, far more than usual at that time in the morning, some bringing memories, thanksgivings and prayers for healing finding comfort at the foot of the cross, this very cross hung in memory of those who died and under which we see inscribed the words of Queen Elizabeth 11, "Grief is the price we pay for love." For Jesus, the price of love was his death on the cross on which we ponder today.

I remember glimpsing the enduring pain of 9/11 at the 9/11 memorial; witnessed by the intricate displays of artifacts at the 9/11 museum; gnarled ladders, media extracts, peoples' voices, make-shift gurneys, and...crosses molded from debris bearing remnants of peoples' belongings, each a carefully chosen symbol of intertwined suffering souls. Outside, are the deep pools of remembrance, dark abysses, mirroring the deep dark depths of sadness, the depths from which we cry to the Lord.

And in the midst of the darkness of that place, Christ was *and is* found in the accounts and actions of the first responders, bearers of hope who selflessly reached out to humanity reflecting and living out that Christ-like compassion found on the cross.

In the darkness of that place there are, too, moments of light and hope to be found in the sights and sounds of the carefully crafted installations and unexplained memorials: the Survivor tree in the grounds, in Spencer Finch's *Trying To Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning*, located in the museum's subterranean exhibition space, a dramatic work inspired by the memorably clear, intensely blue sky of that fateful morning.

And as I ascended to leave that space, a haunting rendition of *Amazing Grace* was being played by bagpipes. Grace - that inexplicable enormous gift received at Christ's expense. A fresh reminder of just how small and helpless is my life, and my love a mere shadow of the height, length and depth of Christ's unending love. In this place of memorial and miracles you may too recall a huge 17-foot, 4,000-pound steel beam, excavated from the debris by Frank Silecchia. This cross became a huge comfort, a place of refuge, on which to cling to. This molded beam became a focus of hope and healing and a makeshift shrine blessed by Father Brian Jordan, a Franciscan priest who, along with others, celebrated mass at the foot of that cross.

Each Holy Week, we ponder the extraordinary love of Christ as he hung on the cross, drawing the whole world closer to him. Each Good Friday, we are reminded of our smallness and his greatness but, more than that, the astonishing reality that there is nothing that cannot be brought to the foot of the cross, for his love encompasses all of the crosses born of human experience: betrayal, despair, physical pain, poverty, fear, abuse, rejection, sickness, failure, loss, persecution, grief and death including the fear of our own mortality. This challenge for each is reflected in these words by the 17th century writer Francois de La Rochefoucauld. "*One can no more look steadily at death than at the sun,*" and yet, by the merits of Jesus' crucifixion, we know that on the other side of death is life; beyond the pain is joy and the knowledge that death can be way to life.

The cross we proclaim in our creeds, sing about in our hymns, read about in our lessons, trace on our bodies as a form of prayer, are attempts to live by the cross in order to discover the glory of the cross – the cross

with which we were all marked or *signed* with as we were anointed at our baptism and drawn into the love of God each and every day. What is our response? We are called to respond with free yet grateful hearts for “love” as St. Thérèse of Lisieux reflected, “*is repaid by love alone.*”

In the liturgy of the Anglican Church of Kenya, the Eucharist ends with a blessing that involves the congregation using their bodies to pray. Instead of making the sign of the cross, they are invited to sweep a hand towards the cross above the altar with each refrain and then, with the last refrain, to sweep their hand towards heaven. May this too be our prayer:

All our problems:

**We send to the cross of Christ.**

All our difficulties:

**We send to the cross of Christ.**

All the devil’s works:

**We send to the cross of Christ.**

All our hopes:

**We set on the risen Christ.**