

Sunday, September 14, 2025  
Holy Cross Day

Solemn Eucharist  
11:00 am

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A Sermon by  
The Rev. Canon Carl Turner  
on  
Galatians 6:14-18; John 12:31-36a  
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**"The Cross is not a problem to be understood, but a mystery into which we enter."**

*-Kenneth Leech*

*The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. The only way out of the labyrinth of suffering is to forgive, welcome without judgment, love without condition, forgive without limit.*

Words of Charlie Kirk who was brutally murdered a few days ago, quoted by the Governor of Utah, Spencer Cox, in an emotional yet calm speech. Even though there are things that Charlie Kirk has said over the years that I strongly disagree with, those words, for me, are the heart of what we are celebrating today on the Feast of the Holy Cross: *"The only way out of the labyrinth of suffering is to forgive, welcome without judgment, love without condition, forgive without limit."*

I was struck by these words of Governor Cox in particular,

*We will never be able to solve all the other problems, including the violence problems that people are worried about, if we can't have a clash of ideas safely and securely. Even especially, especially, those ideas with which you disagree. That's why this matters so much.*

My dear friends, we see so much violence on our TV screens; we hear it every day on the news; read about it in our newspapers and, yes, we come to Church to get away from all of it but, of course, we Christians, even when treated poorly, or persecuted, or even hated are called to preach a message of reconciliation; of love rather than hate; of understanding rather than discord; of forgiveness rather than revenge. So, my friends, we can't ignore it – we have to pray about it and do something about it as a community built on love and forgiveness flowing from the broken heart of Jesus on the cross. What is the alternative? Violence, hate, and revenge, surely cannot be the answer?

Today we keep Holy Cross Day and the message of the Cross is a message of hope. The message of the Cross will never be understood by those who put themselves first and want to trample on those who are weak or marginalized; the message of the Cross is a message of liberation from the evil that seems to infect our world; against the sinfulness of wicked people; against those who would wish us harm when we are simply trying to do good.

From our Epistle reading today, Paul said: *"May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (but listen to what he says next) "...by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."*

Let's digress for a moment. You may think that this feast is a kind of second celebration of Good Friday; but it is not. I have a friend whose family loves to do 'Christmas in July' – including a Christmas tree! But Holy Cross Day is not a second Good Friday because this is a celebration of the Cross seen through the lens of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we shall sing this afternoon at evensong in our processional hymn, *"The cross he bore is life and health though shame and death to him: his people's hope, his people's wealth, their everlasting theme."* You may not know, but the origin of today's feast is not Good Friday, but the discovery of the first relic of the true Cross by Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, and the consecration of the first Church of the Holy Sepulcher built over that place in Jerusalem 1690 years ago in the year 335 – on this day. The day after the consecration, the relic of the true cross was venerated for the first time publicly after centuries of Christian persecution.

I remember walking the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem with our pilgrims three years ago, which ends at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. We prayed at the place believed to have been Mount Calvary, where you can place your hand deep into a hole where the cross is said to have stood; we walked past the anointing stone as women poured oil onto it; and we bent our bodies to enter into the holy sepulcher itself and see the place where Jesus rose from the dead.

To those who do not believe, the cross is a sign of abject failure but, for us, because Jesus rose from the dead, it is a sign of victory. Because of the Resurrection, what happened on the Cross changed everything – it became a salvific event that finally beat down Satan and all his works. And because of what happened on the Cross, the Resurrection is no mere resuscitation of a corpse – it is the glorious transformation of mortal flesh into something imperishable and immortal – a sign of hope and life.

Jesus said, *"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."*

I will draw all people to myself. **All** people; black and white and all manner of skin pigmentation; young and old; gay, straight, trans, single, married, sad, lonely, joyful, rich, successful, poor, homeless, dispossessed and hungry. **I will draw all people to myself, says Jesus.** republican and democratic; communist and fascist; Mother Teresa's sisters feeding the dying in Calcutta still to this day and those who believe in genocide. **I will draw all people to myself, says Jesus,** because he is the only one who can bring true reconciliation and forgiveness. It is only Jesus who can heal the wounds of sin and division. It is only Jesus who can change people's hearts and help them see the wrong that they are doing; it is only Jesus who can make that kind of difference to our world.

Sometimes, I am told not to bring these kinds of things into the pulpit. And I get it – we come here to find solace; to find peace; not to be reminded of the disfunction of our world but, my friends, it is not okay to ignore the pain of the world and of our community. Michael Ramsey once said it is not okay that we have all this pain and division; it is not okay that we have discrimination and people not caring or listening to

one another; it is not okay to turn a blind-eye and ignore suffering because, as he so powerfully said when I heard him preaching on this very same gospel text, "it was the 'okay' that crucified Jesus in the first place."

*"You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed."* Caiphas. John 11, verse 50.

It was the 'okay' that crucified Jesus.

"How do we change things when we can feel so helpless? How do we make a difference when we feel so weak and powerless. How can we be strong and show true forgiveness when we feel attacked or, even worse, ignored and our message seen as irrelevant?

*"The only way out of the labyrinth of suffering is to forgive, welcome without judgment, love without condition, forgive without limit."*

The judgement of the world that Jesus speaks of comes not through the exercise of power, or through angry voices; or through scoring points; or through domination over those with whom we disagree; and especially not through weapons and violence. It comes through the arms of Jesus stretched wide on the cross in a loving embrace. And we, my friends, must allow ourselves to be drawn into that embrace.

I used to know the theologian Ken Leech when I was a young priest, nearly 40 years ago. Many of us belonged to what he called "the Jubilee Group" we were a pretty lefty but a very Anglo-Catholic group of priests who all worked in the inner city in some very deprived areas and concerned about poverty and inequality in those cities and in our communities where we lived and worked. I remember some words of Ken which speak as powerfully to me now as they did then. He said, *"The Cross is not a problem to be understood, but a mystery into which we enter."*

### **The Cross is not a problem to be understood, but a mystery into which we enter.**

For some of us, in our lives, we may very well experience the mystery of the cross in all its pain, humiliation, and suffering. I was talking with Bishop John O'Hara the other day; his Parkinsons has really advanced, and he said that he now realized that his ministry as a bishop had to adapt to the way his body was failing him. He told me movingly how he was every day reflecting on the cross and the sufferings of Christ and how, next year, when he went with the Order of Malta to Lourdes, he would do so not in a procession of bishops in fine robes but in a wheelchair with those who are sick and disabled.

So, my friends, when you see or hear disturbing things – violence, disagreements, war, suffering, or even just people being unkind to one another, remember the words of Jesus: **"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."**

And, however you attempt to respond, remember what Michael Ramsey said – it's not okay – so don't pretend it is. You may feel helpless, but you can take all your pain, suffering, frustration, and peoples' prejudices, to the Cross.

I want to end with the dismissal used in the Anglican Church in Kenya. Now, it means you must be a little non-Episcopalian and use your hands in prayer but, don't worry, it will only embarrass you for a moment

and, in any case, when Archbishop Sentimu had you all waving your arms around a couple of years ago on Easter Day, I know that you secretly rather enjoyed it!

In your bulletin, you should have a little card with an image of the cross next to this pulpit. (Choir and ministers – you will have to turn to face the cross over here and, boys, you can set an example for us). With the first three statements, you sweep your arm towards the cross. With the last statement, you sweep your arm towards heaven.

Please stand. Let's spend a moment and think of the things that might be troubling you, our community, or our country today.

*Celebrant* All our problems,

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

*Celebrant* All our difficulties,

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

*Celebrant* All the devil's works,

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

*Celebrant* All our hopes,

*People* **We set on the risen Christ.**

**In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

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