

Reflection Thursday 24th September

The Cross – Wendy Carter

The Collect for Holy Cross:

Almighty God, who in the passion of your blessed Son, made an instrument of painful death, to be for us the means of life and peace: grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ that we may gladly suffer for his sake; who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Holy Cross Day may have passed you by this year because it fell on a Monday, [Sept 14th]. Originally it was a day to commemorate the dedication of the church of the Holy Sepulchre, built over the site of the Cross in Jerusalem, but it has become a day set aside to venerate or honour the Cross, quite separate from Passiontide. It gives us an opportunity to think of its symbolism more objectively, to glory in it. On Good Friday it is soaked with the Saviour's blood. It is difficult to see it as anything but a means of torture and death, a place of sacrifice to save humanity. But we have been living as resurrection people since Easter and we can celebrate in its victory, as the hymn 'Lift high the Cross' reminds us [George W Kitchin and Michael R Newbolt. Copyright Hymns Ancient & Modern Ltd.]

Lift high the Cross,

the love of Christ proclaim,

Till all the world adore his sacred name!

Led on their way by this triumphant sign

The hosts of God,

in joyful praise combine.

The crosses we see in most Anglican churches are triumphant crosses – empty, not waiting the victim, but celebrating his triumph over death and His new risen life – and our salvation. We turn to the cross for life. The hymn continues:

Saved by the cross,

whereon their Lord was slain,

now Adam's children their lost home regain.

Early Christian art depicts Jesus reigning from the Cross, only since medieval times has He been emphasised suffering on it. Christians live with the reality of His resurrection, as the collect for Holy Cross reminds us, it is for us 'the means of life and peace'.

From furthest regions

Let them homage bring,

And on His cross adore their Saviour King.

Set up Thy throne,

That earth's despair may cease

Beneath the shadow of its healing peace.

At our Baptism we are signed with the cross. In pre-covid baptisms God parents and others were given the opportunity to mark the candidate with a cross, so repeating the seal the priest had made on the child's forehead with blessed oil. We are absolved from sin by the sign of the cross . In the Ordination service many priests are anointed by the presiding Bishop with the sign of the cross in oil, on their hands. When we bless the Palm crosses, the Easter Garden, harvest offerings, gifts for church, a new home, use water from a holy water stoup, mark penitents with ashes at the beginning of Lent, it is all done with the sign of the cross

Do you wear a cross I wonder? or carry one in your pocket or on your keyring?

If you do, is it a reminder of your relationship with God? – that He came fully human as Jesus to show us how much the Father loves us - to the extent of paying for our sinfulness with his own innocent human life. Its not a piece of decoration then, but a symbol of that living relationship. The cross I wear is from Galilee, bought on a wonderful Parish pilgrimage to The Holy Land some ten years before I was ordained. It has always felt important, a kind of 'badge of Christian office' reminding me of his love for me and my duty to him and often not visible to anyone else. I 'cross' myself in church too, to remind myself that I belong to the triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that what I do, I do in His presence.

There is a mysterious power to The Cross. Sometimes when someone is too ill or too anxious to pray with words, I have given a 'holding cross', which is smooth wood, carved to fit easily in the palm of a hand. I know the comfort of wordlessly holding on to it in faith and trust. The power is in our connection with God and perhaps it is more powerful because we are unable to rely on our own resources. We are simply resting in His love and open to whatever He

gives. Palm crosses too are often received gratefully by the most unexpected people.

Suffering is part of life- sometimes as a direct result of our faith when we are ridiculed and ignored. There are many in the world who are persecuted, imprisoned, tortured or killed for being Christian. Illness or accident causes physical pain, mental and emotional pain accompanies grief, broken relationships, pressure of work and has been part of the Covid experience for many shut away from family or friends. Holding a Cross can help.

I will face this pain.

I will accept its full impact silently

Turning my gaze on the Cross

The crucified Christ is in this hell with me

Even here I am held in the love of Jesus

Who is Love- in death

And Love-risen

Last Sunday someone came to me after the morning service. She told me that she had to tell someone who would understand; something amazing had happened to her in the previous few days. She had been troubled for some months with a tiresome cough, which would not go away. The doctors could not explain it or do much to help. She had been reading her Bible and was moved by the story of the woman who secretly touched the hem of Jesus robe in a crowded place [Luke 8:42-48] and was immediately healed. She said "I looked up at my crucifix, took it down, kissed it and held it close to me, I felt surrounded by His peace. I haven't coughed since!" Her eyes were full of joy! It was a miracle for her and a boost to the faith of both of us. The cross - a means of death, but life and peace for us who believe.