

Traditional Home service

Sunday 2nd April

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty and everlasting God, who in your tender love towards the human race sent your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ to take upon him our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross: grant that we may follow the example of his patience and humility, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Lord Jesus Christ, we confess we have failed you as did your first disciples. We ask for your mercy and your help.

Our selfishness betrays you:
Lord, forgive us. Christ have mercy.

We fail to share the pain of your suffering:
Lord, forgive us. Christ have mercy.

We run away from those who abuse you:
Lord, forgive us. Christ have mercy.

We are afraid of being known to belong to you:
Lord, forgive us. Christ have mercy.

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts. Open our lips, Lord: and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*Hosanna! Hosanna!*)

READINGS - Isaiah 50:4-9a
Matthew 21:1-11

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Spend some time praying for our nation, our community and our families.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (*All glory, laud, and honour*)

CONCLUSION

The love of the Lord Jesus draw you to himself, the power of the Lord Jesus strengthen you in his service, the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.
Amen.

Hymns to use

1 Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.

Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.

Lord, we lift up your name,
with hearts full of praise.

Be exalted, O Lord my God;
hosanna in the highest.

2. Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings.

Glory, glory, glory to the King of kings.

Lord, we lift up your name,
with hearts full of praise.

Be exalted, O Lord my God;
glory to the King of kings.

1 All glory, laud, and honour
to you, Redeemer, King,
to whom the lips of children
made sweet hosannas ring.
You are the King of Israel
and David's royal Son,
now in the Lord's name coming,
the King and Blessed One.

2 The company of angels
is praising you on high;
and we with all creation
in chorus make reply.
The people of the Hebrews
with palms before you went;
our praise and prayer and anthems
before you we present.

3 To you before your passion
they sang their hymns of praise;
to you, now high exalted,
our melody we raise.
As you received their praises,
accept the prayers we bring,
for you delight in goodness,
O good and gracious King!

Sermon - Adrian Morton
Matthew 21:1-11 - The cross

This morning of course is Palm Sunday.
It is when we remember Jesus riding into
Jerusalem on a donkey.
Riding in as a King...

<Refer to Palm crosses...>

This morning though I want to focus on the cross rather than the Palm!

Jesus was riding into Jerusalem, ultimately to his death.

And Jesus' death on a cross is central to the Christian faith.
It is the pivotal event in history.

It's been often said that the Gospels contain an unusually large and detailed account of Jesus' death on the cross.

Other religious leaders have books giving much detail about their lives and kind of just mention their death at the end.

Whereas for Jesus, his death seemed to be the main focus of His life.
That is where His life was heading.

Much of the rest of the NT is trying to unravel and explain the events of the cross.

So when it comes to Christian faith, we should never wander too far from the cross.

It is so central and so important.

Before I went to vicar school, I have to admit the cross was much of a mystery to me.

After spending two years at vicar school, the cross is still very much a mystery to me!

I used to feel a bit guilty about that.

But then I started to read people like John Stott, a well known and renowned Bible teacher and he said this:

"I cannot begin to unfold the meaning of the death of Christ without first confessing that much remains a mystery."

Those of you who have seen Nicky Gumbel on the Alpha videos will know he starts his talk, 'Why did Jesus die?', by saying isn't it strange that many people walk around with a symbol of execution around their necks.

Which is a really good point!
It's like having an electric chair necklace!
Or a gallows pendant!

Yet this symbol of the cross is a symbol of Hope to millions of people around the world.

Christians see the cross (as well as the Resurrection) as the Hope for the world.

So I want to look at that this morning.
Why is the cross regarded as such Hope.

Well On the cross, the bible says Jesus died for our sins.

The phrase Peter the disciple uses is this:

"he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree."

When it comes to sin or our sins.
We need a biblical understanding of that.

<Speed Awareness Course!

On the course, we all try and justify why we were caught...
distracted by a day out...
children shouting in the car...
Old ladies listening to the arches...

Cross section of people... Reminder that we all people do wrong...

But we misunderstand Biblical sin if we just think it is about the rules and regulations we sometimes don't follow.

I'm not saying it's not important to keep to the speed limit.
Of course it is.

But when it comes to sin we can be in danger of trivialising it.

It's like when we say:

"I ate a bit of chocolate today... I'm so naughty."

When the Bible talks about sin, it is always in relationship to God.
We break God's laws.
It is rebellion against God.
We are being disobedient to His voice.
It's when we try and replace Him as Lord of our lives.

At its root... sin is about a rebellion against God and His ways.

If we view sin like that then all of us have a problem with sin.
Because we all have this inherent selfishness that we want to live life our way.

If we just think sin is about rules and regulations then we'll start to compare our sins with other people's.

I may speed but at least I don't fiddle my taxes.
Or at least I don't steal pens from my employer.

Or whatever.

Whenever we compare ourselves to others, we always do well in our own eyes.

My sins are never so bad as other people's...

But at the root of Sin, as I've said, is something more serious.

<Talk about funerals, - 'I did it my way' >

At its root Sin looks like a life of 'I did it my way'.

When someone ignores the creator of this universe.
The One who has given us Life.
The One who promises us Life.

And we've gone our own way.
That's sin.

Mankind's highest destiny is to know God.
To be in a personal relationship with Him.

Our chief claim to nobility as human beings is that we were made in the image of God and are therefore capable of knowing Him.

And so the most terrible result of sin, biblical sin, is that it cuts us off from God.
It alienates us from our highest destiny.

It's why sin is so serious.
Sin and the holiness of God just can't co-exist.

So Sin brings inevitable separation, and this separation leads to death, spiritual death.

The Bible says it like this:
"The wages of sin is death."

Our Sin needs to be dealt with.
It needs atoning for.

Going back to what Peter said:

"he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree."

On the cross Jesus died in our place as our sin bearer.

The separation, the alienation, that existed was fixed.
Jesus paid the price for our rebellion.

He paid the price for all the times we have replaced God as Lord of our life.

He atoned, made things right, for our sins.
He reconciled us back to God.

If you know the crucifixion account, you will read that when Jesus died on the cross the temple curtain was ripped in two.

This thick curtain separated the Holy Place in the Jewish temple and the Most Holy Place where the glory, the presence of God dwelt.

No-one was allowed to pass through into God's presence except the High Priest, and he only on the annual Day of Atonement and then only if he took with him the blood of sacrifice for sins.

That this curtain was ripped into two, was God's visual demonstration that His presence was now available for all.

That reconciliation was made.

Our sins have been dealt with.
Covered.

God has refused to count our sins against us.

He has not made us answerable for our sins.
Our sins are completely forgiven.

'For our sake, He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.'

Why is the cross a symbol of such Hope?
Our highest destiny of knowing God is now available.

Why else is the cross a symbol of such Hope?

Well sin isn't good for us.
It makes us less human.

Sin turns us inwards, it makes us self centred.
It corrupts our nature.
Its like an inner disease.

The Bible describes it as being enslaved to sin.

In John 8 Jesus says, 'Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.'
Being a slave is usually not a great occupation.

Its like Sin has a power over us.

Bishop J. C. Ryle, a former bishop of Liverpool once wrote:

"Each and all sins have crowds of unhappy prisoners bound hand and foot in their chains... The wretched prisoners... boast sometimes that they are eminently free... There is no slavery like this. Sin is indeed the hardest of all task masters. Misery and disappointment by the way, despair and hell in the end - these are the only wages that sin pays to its servants."

One of the consequences of sin is that it makes people miserable!
Often though people don't realise that.

What sin can do is give momentary pleasure.
But then it fails to satisfy.
It fails to deliver on its promise.

In Psalm 51, King David, has just committed adultery with Bathsheba.
I'm sure at the time it gave him a bit of pleasure.
A bit of satisfaction.
She was a beautiful woman.

But when he realises the gravity of his Sin.

He cries out to God:

"Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice."

I think that is very telling.

What I believe sin does, is sap from us joy and gladness.
And we may not realise it at the time.

Or rather we may not realise that is what is happening to us.

Sin, if nothing was done about it, has a power over us.

And of course we know that with things like addictions.
Drink, drugs etc...

But it is with other things.

Anything you cannot stop doing has a power over you.

On the cross, as Jesus bore our sins, he removed the power of sin.

The bible says He set us free from sin and death.
He has given us a new nature.
And a new freedom from sin.

Now you don't need me to tell you that even as believers we still sin.

But we are in a very different place.

We are not in bondage anymore.

For some believers, it feels as though they are.

But they are not.
That's the enemy trying to convince you He still has power over you.
We may have to work out how to walk in the freedom that has been won for us.

But the power of Sin has been broken.

I've heard of people giving up smoking, or drugs, just like that. Overnight.

I'm well aware for others walking in freedom is a process.

But the power of sin has been broken.

Because believers have a new nature, I think we know sin just kind of grates now.
We know it doesn't belong to this new nature we have.

We recognise more easily that it robs us of joy and gladness.

The cross is a symbol of such Hope because it has removed the power of Sin.

CONCLUSION

On the face of it, the cross of Jesus is the most ridiculous of notions.

How can such an act of cruelty, humiliation, weakness be such a symbol of Hope?
Even the Bible calls it foolishness.

Paul in 1 Cor says, "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*"

I've had countless experiences of trying to explain the cross to people and they look at me as if I've gone mad.

I've even thought to myself while explaining it... yes, this sounds like madness.

Yet, millions of people have put their faith in it.

And experienced its power to change lives.

How does the cross bring power to our lives.
It has to start by us recognising our need for it.

Jesus said, "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*"

Only when we have realised and faced up to the seriousness of our sin will we admit our urgent need for a cure.

Only when we realise that we are alienated from God, going our own way, enslaved to sin are we ready for the power of the cross.

And whilst we may not understand some parts of it, or even most of it.
We can still put our faith in it.
We can still choose to believe it.

The cross puts to death any notion that religious observance or good deeds could ever earn our forgiveness.

It puts to death any notion that Christianity is a religion of human merit.

Christianity is a rescue religion.

It declares that God has taken the initiative in Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sins.

We can't wander far from the cross.

It is the source of great Hope...
Our alienation from God is fixed.
Our highest destiny of knowing God is now available.

And it has removed the power of Sin.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."