
Lift High the Cross

**An Evensong meditation by the Rev. Canon David Boyd
The Feast of the Holy Cross**

On this day, in the year 335, the city of Jerusalem buzzed with expectation. The Roman Emperor Constantine had ordered the construction of a church on the site where Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised. For generations, Golgotha had been a place of shame and fear, a trash heap outside the city walls where dissidents and criminals were nailed up to die. But now, the empire that once used the cross to terrify its subjects was consecrating a church to honor the crucified.

Imagine the scene: bishops processing in ornate vestments, choirs chanting psalms, pilgrims streaming from every corner of the empire. And at the center of it all, the True Cross itself was brought forward and lifted high for the faithful to venerate. The very instrument of Jesus' execution, the empire's strongest symbol of fear, was now the Church's sign of triumphant victory.

Today is Holy Cross Day, a day in which we not only remember the consecration of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, but also celebrate the great reversal that makes it possible to call the cross holy.

Crucifixion, before Jesus, was the empire's way of keeping control. More than a means of exacting punishment, crucifixion was violent political theater. Victims of the empire were displayed as warnings, left to die slowly in public. It was not just about executing the guilty but frightening the many. Too gruesome to inflict on citizens, it was reserved for the conquered. The cross proclaimed a fearful message: "Submit or die."

And yet, the Church dares to lift up the cross and call it salvation. The cross was meant to be the world's judgment on Jesus, a final, silencing verdict, but God overturned that judgment and made it God's own verdict on the world's corrupt way of running things. What was meant to crush hope became the very place where hope blossomed and bloomed, like an Easter lily bursting open at dawn.

There are, in a sense, two crosses. There is the cross humanity built: the lynching tree, the place where society's anger and vengeance are poured out on a single victim. And there is the cross God makes of it: the tree of life, where the endless cycle of retaliation is broken.

This is the heart of Holy Cross Day: in Jesus, God takes the worst we can do and transforms it into the means of our salvation. The cross is no longer the world's tool to frighten us into submission. It becomes God's sign that we are saved. That we are free.

In the golden light of the cross, we can see a new way. A way that rejects reactionary fear. No more retribution. No more vengeance dressed up as justice. No more rejoicing at the downfall of our enemies as though their death could somehow save us.

The way of the cross is a hard way. In this tense, unravelling political climate, temptation abounds. There is an insidious temptation to cheer when someone we despise is cut down. In the face of political violence, it is tempting to react with fearful hate and demand immediate punishment, that more violence will finally set things right. It is tempting to believe that we must sacrifice our humanity to keep the world safe. But the cross unmasks those lies.

Christians are not crucifiers. We are not crusaders. We are cross-bearers. And to bear the cross is to refuse to become what killed Jesus. It means rejecting the lure of vengeance. It means refusing to treat tragic death with callousness. It means saying "no" when the world tries to recruit us into its endless cycles of fear and payback.

To be clear, this does not mean we turn away from the pursuit of justice. Like a beam of light breaking into the

darkness, the cross reveals what we would rather keep hidden. The light of the cross exposes the cruelty of power, the ugliness of fear, the futility of vengeance. And in that light, God's answer is not to strike back but to interrupt the cycle entirely. The cross enables us to seek reconciliation instead of revenge.

And we who look upon that cross are called to be children of the cross' light. To live as people who refuse to return to the shadows, who will not be driven by fear, who let our lives shine with the same radiance that streams from the holy cross.

"While you have the light," Jesus says, "believe in the light, so that you may become children of light."

So today we lift high the cross. We lift it high as a sign of God's definitive victory over all that would hold us captive: over fear, over violence, over death. And we can leave here resolved to let that cross shape how we speak, how we act, and how we respond when fear and anger rise up in us. May we live cruciform lives.

Thanks be to God that the cross still stands, that its light still shines. Amen.