

The Parish of All Saints' and Saint Saviours. Lent Study 2021.

Session 4.

The Cross of God.

Bible Reading

They travelled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go round Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!

Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us. So Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.

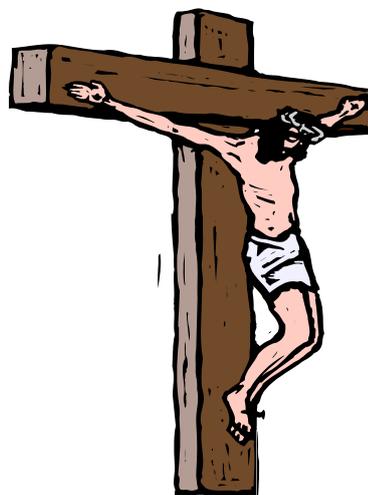
So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived. The Israelites moved on and camped at Oboth.

Numbers 21: 4 – 9

In the previous three sessions we have discussed the Bible, the Church, and the person of Jesus. In this weeks session we shall look at the Cross of Jesus, which brought about His death, and our salvation. The cross is an everyday icon in today's world. Not only is it seen as the Christian symbol, but it is widely worn round people's necks as jewellery; it is seen as a sign of medical aid, such as with the Red Cross, and even department stores have "Blue Cross Days", when everything with a cross on the price ticket has its price cut. But for those who profess the Christian faith, it is the symbol and the instrument of our salvation. However we

need to remember, that even for us, the cross on its own is simply two pieces of wood nailed together. Without Jesus, it is meaningless to us. For crucifixion was simply the Roman method of execution two thousand years ago. It was no different from the electric chair, or lethal injection, or hanging today. It was a way of putting people to death.

However, it was a pretty cruel and unpleasant death. To fully understand the enormity of Jesus, death and sacrifice, we need to consider crucifixion in more detail. Firstly Jesus had to carry his cross, weighing about 80 pounds for about two miles uphill, in the heat, whilst people spat at him, and threw stones at him He was then stripped of his clothes, and had a crown of thorns placed



on his head. He then had nails, six to eight inches long, hammered into his wrists and ankles; before the cross was raised. Once upright on the cross, Jesus had to endure not only pain from nails, and the crown of thorns, but would have had to struggle to breathe because of his position. He would also have been losing blood, which would have also affected his breathing. It was hot in the afternoon sun, and Jesus would quickly have become dehydrated. Jesus had to endure all this for three hours, so death would have been a merciful release.

But none of this happened by itself. We need to remember that Jesus' crucifixion was actually carried out by human beings like ourselves. Soldiers, Pontius Pilate, the Jewish High Priests, the people who cried "Crucify him". Due to the actions of ordinary men and women, Jesus, fully human and fully divine, was cruelly tortured and put to death. Yet Jesus went through all this willingly. He died so that the whole of humanity may have the opportunity to experience everlasting life with God, in heaven. He died so that the gates of Paradise, which had been sealed shut as a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience, could once more be opened to all humanity.

In order to obtain this promise of eternal life, we are required to believe in the name of Jesus, and, in the words of our Baptismal promises, "Turn to Christ", and "Repent of our Sins". Jesus, speaking to us from the Cross, calls us to do just that. To believe, and to repent. Dare we ignore that call when the life of our souls is at stake. Dare we ignore that call when our salvation was won with such pain and suffering. Dare we ignore it when Christ's sacrifice was made with such love. For it is love that is at the heart of it. God's love for us; Jesus love for us. For however we see the Cross in our multi-faith society, for us Christians it can only be a sign of God's enormous love for all of humanity, that he sent his Son to suffer and die for us, that we may live with Him forever.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."
John 3:16"

Prayer.

Almighty Father,
look with mercy on this your family
for which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed
and given up into the hands of wicked men
to suffer death upon the cross;
who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.