



healing
participation
victory

MERCY

love

suffering

reconciliation

sacrifice

glory freedom

forgiveness

justice

wholeness

salvation
hope

THE

WONDROUS
CROSS

5 sessions exploring the
message and meaning of
Christ's death on the cross.

Preface

Following on from our first course, *Dying to Know*, we have tried to put together a course that engages with some of the recent conversations about atonement and our theology of the cross. Some things people have said about the cross have been a little controversial, but there is much to learn from reflecting on the different ways the bible and theologians over the centuries have spoken about the cross.

We are particularly thankful for the work of Tom Smail in his two books on this subject: *Windows on the Cross* and *Once and for All*. This course is based quite heavily on these books but tries to offer an opportunity for disciples of Jesus to spend some time reflecting on the meaning of cross.

We ran this course for the first time in a multi-denominational setting during Lent and found a very positive response to the course. We also were encouraged by the way people engaged with this material.

We simply offer you this material, hoping you may find it useful in your setting.

Tim Hyde & John Draycott

Find us on the Web

Updates to this course and additional resources will be published on our website:

talk2.org.uk

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Acknowledgements

Unless otherwise stated or in error!, bible references are quoted from the TNIV:

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Introduction

This course aims to help people explore the multifaceted message of the Cross. There has been a great deal of debate in recent years, about how best to speak of the cross. Yet these debates have existed throughout Christian History and highlight the fact that there are many ways of speaking about how what man did 2000 years ago, by dying on a cross, has such significance for human being and the world around us. The bible and theologians throughout history have spoken of the cross in many different ways and this course has been put together to encourage you to reflect on the meaning and power of the cross from different angles.

There are five sessions, and we first run this during Lent. You could turn this into seven or more sessions if you were to cover all the different metaphors and images used to articulate the meaning of the cross. It is based on group discussion and bible study, aided by references to material from popular culture.

Structure of course

Each of the five sessions includes leader's notes and a handout, which may be copied and given to each participant.

We refer often in the leader's notes to *Windows on the Cross* by Tom Smail and his other book *Once and for All*. We think that those running this course will find these books an essential companion to the course. See the bibliography for details of these and other resources.

The course runs over 5 sessions and takes on a different dimension, image or metaphor for the cross each week. The five sessions are: *Reconciliation*, *Sacrifice*, *Justice*, *Victory* and *Suffering*. We wanted to encourage Participants to reflect on rather than just debate the issues, so each week the sessions end with ideas for responding in a reflective and tactile way. If you don't like our suggestions you will find other suitable ideas on creativeprayer.com.

Each session includes:

- some kind of icebreaker
- movie clips or other cultural references
- small group discussions
- a core bible reading and group bible study
- plenary and teaching elements hosted by course leader(s)
- a responsive/reflective activity

Movie clips and other material

The course uses numerous video clips and music tracks as well as other material from our culture. These are items that were known to the authors and their communities, so you are encouraged to use your own alternatives, if you can. The internet is a rich source of illustrative material, whether it be lyrics to popular songs or some mash up on YouTube.

Many of our clips were found on WingClips (www.wingclips.com), a site providing clips from popular movies, with permission granted legally ready for use in church settings.

Planning your group

Of course if you are going to run a course, you need people to come, someone to lead it and place to meet.

The course is aimed primarily at Christians. You can download a poster from our website that you can use to promote the course. (<http://talk2.org.uk/>)

You will obviously need at least one leader, often a minister, but someone who has at least read *Windows on the Cross* and has a sufficiently broad understanding of the Christian faith and theology to field the many and varied questions and comments that this course will provoke.

The numbers of people attending may vary from church to church. It is possible to run with large numbers as long as you break into smaller groups for the discussion based activities.

Support & Feedback

We hope this course will grow with you and so value all comments and feedback via our website: <http://talk2.org.uk/>. This site will also include links to online resources and additional material other people find useful for the course.

Bibliography and Further Reading

Some books that you will find helpful in preparing to run this course:

Tom Smail, *Windows on the Cross* (London:1995, Darton Longman and Todd ltd)

Tom Smail, *Once and for All: A Confession of the Cross* (Darton,Longman & Todd Ltd 1998)

Joel B. Green & Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Inter-Varsity Press 2000)

Steve Holmes, *The Wondrous Cross: Atonement and Penal Substitution in the Bible and History* (Paternoster Press 2007)

Course Sessions

Reconciliation

Introduce the Course

Introduce the course, explaining that while the cross is central to Christian faith, the bible and theologians over the years have spoken of its power and effect in many and varied ways. Different traditions and times have tended to emphasise different metaphors and meanings. Each session of this course examines the cross through a different metaphor or theme. This first session aims to focus on the cross by exploring the theme of reconciliation. Other sessions will include themes such as *Sacrifice*, *Justice*, *Victory* and *Suffering*.

Movie Clip

Use clips taken from recent news events that show the brokenness of our world. Perhaps scenes of recent riots or conflict. You can probably find plenty of material on YouTube. Then lead into the following discussion.

This [video](#) on Vimeo put to the track *Where is the Love* by the Black-eyed peas may work for you.

Discussion in Groups

In Romans 5 Paul says that we are enemies of God. *Do you agree? What evidence have you seen of this?*

Allow time for discussion and then draw together answers from groups.

Explain that one way the bible presents the message of the cross is that we are enemies of God needing to be reconciled to him and to each other, and this somehow is made possible through the cross.

Movie Clip

Show a movie clip or from TV drama/soap opera that illustrates the difficulty of people being reconciled to each other.

Examples:

Wondrous Oblivion - Making Amends (1:51) on [WingClips](#) (our choice)

In this clip eleven year old David Wiseman is mad about cricket but no good at it. He has all the kit but none of the skill, and he's a laughing stock at school. So when a Jamaican family moves in next door and build a cricket net in the back garden, David is in seventh heaven. But this is 1960's England, and when the neighbours start to make life difficult for the new arrivals, David's family is caught in the middle, and he has to choose between fitting in and standing up for the new friends who have turned his world upside down.

War of the Roses (1989) for humorous look at darker side.

Diary of a Mad Black Woman - Don't Be Like Me (1:48) on [WingClips](#)

Discussion in Groups

Thinking about the situations shown in the movie clips. *Why do you think it is so hard for reconciliation to occur in human relationships that have been broken? Have you witnessed reconciliation take place among your family or friends? What was the key to make it happen?*

Often in human relationships it takes the initiative of one party to make the first move. But to make it work both have to want to make it work.

The Bible

Read together 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Paul says that Christ "reconciled" us to God (v18). How does Jesus through the cross make us friends with God? What responsibility does this new found status place on the church?

Explain

On the cross God is reconciling us to himself. The cross itself is our making, the result of human sin, but in it God is taking the initiative and in Jesus represents both parties. It is important to understand that the cross is not Jesus appeasing an angry God, but rather the action of a loving God to bring about reconciliation with those he loves. (John 3:16)

Paul also reminds us that the church is also therefore to become the vehicle for reconciliation in the world (v19).

Responding

Each week we aim to give space for personal reflection and response. To allow the message of the cross to change us.

Lay out some stones, play some appropriate music, read Matthew 25:23-25 and on a table somewhere at the back of the room place a cross. Invite people to come and pick up a stone, holding it for a while as they think of some of the hard hearts and hard places, perhaps their own where reconciliation is needed. Then invite them to go quietly to place the stone at the foot of the cross and pray for that situation, inviting God to work in it.

When everybody has had chance to do this, you might like to close by sharing the peace together, recognising that as brothers and sisters there should be nothing that divides us.

Suggested Music: Randy Stonehill - *Puppet Strings*.

Worship

Sings a song or hymn that picks up this theme. E.g. Healing God, almighty Father (Mission Praise 226)

Close the session with a prayer.

Reconciliation

Romans 5:10-11

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

In Romans 5 Paul says that we are enemies of God. Do you agree? What evidence have you seen of this?

Why do you think it is so hard for reconciliation to occur in human relationships that have been broken? Have you witnessed reconciliation take place among your family or friends? What was the key to make it happen?

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade people. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Paul says that Christ "reconciled" us to God (v18). How does Jesus through the cross make us friends with God? What responsibility does this new found status place on the church?

PUPPET STRINGS

Randy Stonehill

I can't keep from mourning for this topsy-turvy world / With all its strife and pain / Mourning for the lost and the desperate children / Who can't remember their names

And I can feel it in my soul / Now the end is getting near / I can hear the devil laughing / And its ringing in my ears

Long ago He chose us to inherit all His kingdom / And we were blessed with light / But wandering away we disobeyed Him in the garden / And stumbled into night

And I can feel it in my soul / Now the end is getting near / I can hear the angels weeping / And it's ringing in my ears

We are all like foolish puppets who desiring to be kings / Now lie pitifully crippled after cutting our own strings

But God said I'll forgive you I will face you Man to man / And win your love again / Oh how could there be possibly a greater gift of love / Than dying for a friend

And I can feel it in my soul / Now the end is getting near / I can hear the devil laughing / And it's ringing in my ears

We are all like foolish puppets who desiring to be kings / Now lie pitifully crippled after cutting our own strings

Cutting our own strings / Cutting our own strings / Cutting our own strings

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Sacrifice

This second session aims to explore the language of sacrifice used in the New Testament to speak of the effect of Christ's death on the cross. This theme is picked up particularly in the letter to the Hebrews. The language of sacrifice can be difficult for modern readers to understand.

Ice-breaker

Break into groups and discuss what type of gifts you would give to someone in the following situations:

When wanting to say Thank You

When needing to apologise

When you need to say I love you

Allow some time for sharing of answers.

Movie Clip

Show a clip from [Armageddon](#) starring Bruce Willis, the final scene. This type of heroic action is what we would normally think of as sacrifice, but what does sacrifice mean in the bible?

Explanation

In the Old Testament there were different types of sacrifice. The thank offering was as it suggests an expression of gratitude to God. The fellowship offering was a way of identifying yourself afresh with God and his law. The sin offering was a way of putting things right between you and God by bringing a sacrifice as a sign of repentance and need for forgiveness for sins. And so in a very simplistic way, by bringing sacrifices on these different occasions the worshipper is giving himself afresh to God. (See p28-29 in *Windows on the cross*).

“In sacrifice through representative offering, situations and people that have been closed to God are opened up to him.” (p 75 *Once and for All*)

Sacrifice is an offering that costs you something. The things given as sacrifice were out of possessions. David said something like “I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing” (2 *Sam.* 24:24).

Writers of the New Testament therefore pick up the language of sacrifice to speak of the actions of Jesus. So how does that work?

Bible

Read Hebrews 10:1-18

How does this passage use the language of sacrifice to help us to think about Christ's death on the cross? How does Christ's sacrifice compare with the Old Testament sacrifice? In what way is Christ's sacrifice the ultimate sacrifice?

Explanation

Christ's death on the cross is described as a sacrifice that fulfilled and superseded what had gone on before. Christ's sacrifice is one that deals with the sin problem once and for all.

It is Jesus' obedient self-offering which is him saying "yes" to God on our behalf. He says this not just with his lips but with his life and death. "Here on the cross is a man who does for all of us what none of us could do for ourselves. He is the man who without holding back anything pours himself out in a great offering of self-giving to his father." (p30 *Windows on the Cross*).

The passage puts Ps 40 into Jesus mouth: "here I am, I have come to do your will".

Hebrews 9:21 says "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness". By sharing the consequences of our sin, even death itself, he opens what was closed up to God. (p33 *Windows on the Cross*). It is about the life offered in obedience which culminates in death.

And as Hebrews 7:24-5 says, "because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them". The ultimate sacrifice has the power to cleanse us today.

Movie Clip

Show a clip from the BBC Passion Drama, where Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane. See also Luke 22:39-44.

Discussion

Read Romans 12:1-5 - *In the light of Christ's offering of his life, what might it mean for us to be living sacrifices? Is there someone you have read about, or heard of who would be a good example of what Paul meant by living sacrifice.*

The sacrifice that Jesus has offered cleanses us from sin and opens us up afresh to God, so that we in turn are able to become living sacrifices in worship and daily obedience. Through Christ's death a new humanity is born that is at last restored to its right relationship with God.

Active Response

Finish this session by offering opportunity for confession and re-commitment to God.

Play *Once and for all*, by Pam Thumb. The lyrics on handout.

Hand out some scraps of paper and invite people to listen to the music and to write down those things they sense are wrong in their life. Explain that confession is an important part of coming to God in prayer and opening ourselves to God's work.

When they are done get them to put them in a large tin and then set them a light sharing in the prayer of confession on the handout. Alternatively you could use a paper

shredder, for people to come individually.

(adapted from creativeprayer.com)

Worship

Sing a song such as *I will offer up my life* and close in prayer.

Sacrifice

DISCUSS:

What type of gifts you would give to someone in the following situations:

When wanting to say Thank You?

When needing to apologise?

When you need to say I love you?

Hebrews 10:1-18:

Christ's Sacrifice Once for All

1 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2 Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. 4 It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;

6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.

7 Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—

I have come to do your will, my God.' " [a]

8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. 14 For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

16 "This is the covenant I will make with them
after that time, says the Lord.

I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds." [b]

17 Then he adds:

"Their sins and lawless acts
I will remember no more." [c]

18 And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

DISCUSS:

How does this passage use the language of sacrifice to help us to think about Christ's death on the cross? How does Christ's sacrifice compare with the Old Testament sacrifice? In what way is Christ's sacrifice the ultimate sacrifice?

Romans 12:1-5

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

DISCUSS:

In the light of Christ's offering of his life, what might it mean for us to be living sacrifices?

A Prayer of Confession

Almighty God, our heavenly Father:
We have sinned against you,
through our own fault,
in thought, and word, and deed,
and in what we have left undone.
For the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,
forgive us all our offences;
and grant that we may serve you
in newness of life,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Justice

This third session seeks to explore the cross from the perspective of justice. Theologians over the centuries have tried to borrow language from the law courts to describe the meaning of the cross, and not always so helpfully.

Ice-breaker

In November 2009 there was a story about a clergyman whose adopted daughter was bullied into leaping to her death from a third-floor balcony by two teenage girls said that he has forgiven her tormentors. You can read the article from the Telegraph [here](#).

Get people to read the story together in groups and ask: *How would you respond if it was your daughter?*

Movie

The Merchant of Venice (2004) - the [trailer](#) available on YouTube is a pretty good synopsis of the story.

Alternatively a clip from *Seven pounds from seven people* might work which is based on the same Shakespeare play.

The story is all about how mercy can prevail yet justice still be done. Antonia the rich merchant pledges his money and life to pay the debt of a friend to Shylock the Jew. But Shylock wants his pound of flesh.

Discussion

The legal metaphor is a very familiar way of talking of the cross. For example in hymnody:

Bearing Shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned he stood,
Sealed my pardon with his Blood,
Hallelujah" what a Saviour!

But is God like the Shylock character in the Merchant of Venice? Is it that on the cross we see a loving Father punishing his dearly beloved son? What kind of justice lets anyone but the guilty be punished?

Explain

In Romans 3, Paul writes: "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God". But while we stand condemned we must be careful not to see the cross as the means by which we gain God's merciful attention. The Bible is testimony to the fact that our human tendency to sin is not matched by God's withdrawal. Like with the motif of reconciliation, it isn't God that needs changing it is us. John 3:16 "for God so loved..." is echoed throughout. That God takes the initiative motivated by his steadfast love and mercy must be our starting point.

Sin is taken seriously and justice is served, but it is restorative fulfilling his purpose to

save us. He is a righteous God and a Saviour (Isa 45:21).

Bible

Read Romans 6:24 & 1:18

If God has given us over to the consequences of our sin, how have you seen that work out in your life and the world around?

The judgement of God is being given over to sin. The “wages of sin” are the destructive consequences of sin in our lives, and ultimately death itself. (p45 *Windows on the Cross* and p53 *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*)

Romans 6:10-11 & 5:6-8

What do these verses say Christ achieved and how does it affect our lives?

Explain

Jesus dies to the injustices of men as a sinless man. The judgement is the doing away with sin (dying to it) not punishment of it. He moves in Jesus to restore and make new (2 Cor 5:16-17).

“God's stance toward the world is quintessentially demonstrated in the action of Christ”. Christ took the full consequences of our sin and as a result of his death we are transformed, sharing his life and even finding our own sufferings having significance.

Movie

Show a clip from the film *Les Miserables* (1998) - Javert's suicide, who is unable to come to terms with the fact that a man can change or that justice can sit alongside mercy.

You will find discussion comes easy with this metaphor, Use the movie clip to bring discussion to a conclusion.

Responding

Stations of sand buckets (see Confessions with sand on [creative prayer.com](http://creativeprayer.com)). People grab a handful of sand and put in bag. Leave at cross and light candle.

Play *He was Pierced* or similar while people take part in this.

Worship

Finish by singing To God be the Glory (Mission Praise MP708)

Justice

Article from Daily Telegraph 18 Nov 2009

Vicar forgives girls who bullied his daughter to death

An Anglican vicar whose adopted daughter was bullied into leaping to her death from a third-floor balcony by two teenage girls said that he has forgiven her tormentors.

The Rev Simon Boxall said he and his wife, Rachel, refused to be “shackled by bitterness” over the death of their daughter, Rosie, whom they adopted in Brazil when she was three. The 19 year-old died in May last year after being assaulted and tormented by Oluwakemi Ajose, 19, and 15-year-old Hatice Can, who were found guilty of manslaughter at the Old Bailey yesterday.

The court heard that the two teenagers slapped and punched Miss Boxall and pulled her hair after getting into a row over a boy. The pair sprayed deodorant in Miss Boxall’s face and branded her a “whore”, before she jumped 30ft from the window of the south London flat that they briefly shared. Part of the attack was filmed on a mobile phone and showed Miss Boxall cowering in fright with her head in her hands, but not fighting back. As she lay dying in the street below, Can, who was only 13 at the time, stood over her and was heard saying: “Serves you right, *****.”

Ajose and Can were both known to the police for offences including shoplifting and actual bodily harm. The older girl is believed to have a personality disorder and is being assessed under the Mental Health Act.

Despite the brutality of the attack, Mr Boxall, a vicar at the Open Gateway Community Church in Thamesmead, south London, said he and his family were praying for the assailants. “We want them to know we forgive them. That does not mean that what they did ‘doesn’t matter’. Of course it does,” he said.

Forgiveness means that we refuse to be shackled by bitterness and our prayer is that forgiveness will allow the girls to be released from the burden of what they have done.”

Miss Boxall was adopted by Mr Boxall and his wife after being abandoned as a baby by her alcoholic mother. The couple, who have four natural sons, were working in Rio de Janeiro as missionaries at the time. They adopted her when she was three but only moved back to Britain in 2005, when Miss Boxall was 16.

Read the article about Rev Simon Boxall together in groups and ask: *How would you respond if it was your daughter?*

Is God like the Shylock character in the Merchant of Venice? How do we see a loving Father punishing his dearly beloved son? What kind of justice lets anyone but the guilty be punished?

The legal metaphor is popular in our hymns e.g.:

Bearing Shame and scoffing rude,
In my pace condemned he stood,
Sealed my pardon with his Blood,
Hallelujah” what a Saviour!

O perfect redemption
the purchase of blood!
to every believer the promise of God
The vilest offender who truly believes
that moment from Jesus a pardon
receives

Romans 6:20-24

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 1:18ff

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness ... God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts...

If God has given us over to the consequences of our sin, how have you seen that work out in your life and the world around?

Romans 6:10-11

The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 5:6-8

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

What do these verses say Christ achieved and how does it affect our lives?

Suffering

Ice-breaker

Show a clip of Jordan (Katie Price) from *I'm Celebrity* where she walks away from the seventh bush tucker trial (you'll find it on YouTube). There may be a more appropriate clip at the time you are running the course but this was current when we put this together.

Get into groups and ask the question *Katie Price: villain or victim? How do you see yourself, villain or victim?*

Katie Price quoted in *The Mirror 2010*- "It's gone far enough. I know I'm outspoken and seem tough but nobody deserves what I've been through. I'm not a bad person."

Introduction

Introduce this session by explaining that the cross is most often spoken of in terms of what it achieves for villains. That is its power to atone for sin. But this week's session focusses on the suffering of Christ and therefore how it also is a powerful symbol for victims in our world.

Discussion

Read the poem *Jesus of the Scars* by Edward Shillito (1872-1948). Then in groups ask: *How does this poem reflect or contradict your understanding of Christ on the cross?*

Consider Christ's words from the cross: "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" See also Luke 23:46.

Is this the Father turning his back on the son, or is there also a sense that the Father suffers too?

Movie

Using the film, *Boy in the Stripped Pyjamas* - show clip *becoming one of them* where the German boy goes into the camp.

Who suffers in this story?

Bible

Read Mark's account of the cross.

Who suffers here? How can the message of the cross speak to those who are victims in our world?

Explain

God chooses to suffer and is not aloof. The Father shares in the suffering of Christ.

The emphasis has changed in our modern world. It is no longer “how can sinful humanity be put right with a holy loving God to how can the ways of a holy loving God be justified before a suffering humanity”. Katie Price no matter what she thinks, she is a victim.

The NT also talks of how we share in the sufferings of Christ.

Listen

Make a paper chain, Each person writing on something they are carrying or suffering with. Link them together and pray as one person drapes the chain over the cross.

Worship

Finish with the song: *My Lord, what love is this?*

Suffering

Katie Price - villain or victim? How do you see yourself, villain or victim?

Jesus of the Scars:

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow;
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;
In all the universe we have no place.
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars we claim Thy grace.

If when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;
We know today what wounds are; have no fear;
Show us Thy Scars; we know the countersign.

The other gods were strong, but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

Edward Shillito (1872-1948)

How does this poem reflect or contradict your understanding of Christ on the cross?

Matthew's account of the cross:

16 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. 22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

25 It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27-28 They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. 29 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!"

31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! 32 Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

33 At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). [a]

35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah."

36 Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said.

37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

Who suffers here? How can the message of the cross speak to those who are victims in our world?

Victory & Freedom

Ice-breaker

Break into groups and share with others about an experience or situation where you could say you had “won”? Talk about what victory looks and feels like.

Introduction

Introduce this week's theme by summing up discussion and introduce the idea that the cross is also spoken of in terms of victory.

Movie Clip

Show a clip from end of the film *Gladiator* near the end of the film (Scene 27), where the main character dies but somehow this is seen as victory.

Bible

In groups read some of the following bible references and then discuss the questions below. (Colossians 2:15, Ephesians 6:12, 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, John 19:28-30)

Who are the enemies that Jesus took on and defeated at Calvary? What was it that won the victory there?

Explain

John records Jesus last word in 19:30 with the triumphant shout *Tetelestai*, which means not so much, “it is finished” as “it is accomplished, the battle has been fought, there is nothing left to do because the victory is won.”

On the cross Christ confronts all that Satan has to throw at him.

“All hell was there that day on Calvary and therefore all hell was defeated that day on Calvary when the man on the cross, despite the very worst that the devil and his legions could do to him, rose from the dead.” p87 *Windows on the Cross*

It is on the cross where the victory is won, the resurrection is the first fruits of that victory. This isn't a battle where the side with the biggest weapons wins. Not with cosmic divine might but with the pure vulnerability of his self-giving love. Victory is achieved not through violence but self giving love. (see p89 *Windows on the Cross*) - “The only thing that could defeat evil is Calvary love.”

The resurrection is the first fruit of this victory. Love has the last word.

“The love that gives itself without reserve to God on behalf of the world is proved on the cross to be strong enough and tough enough.”

Movie Clip

Show a the clip from *Narnia* - when Aslan, the lion comes back to life.

Discussion

What are the consequences of that victory for us today?

Jesus victory breaks the power sin. The victorious power of Christ's love is the heart of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. The consequence is that we shall share in that victory in yielding to that love.

Jesus freely gave of his life John 10:17-18. It was not a tragic accident, being overpowered by a greater power rather; he freely embraces death to fulfil the purpose and plan of salvation. The victory is achieved in the cradle of the cross and through the resurrection the freedom to grow into the new humanity.

Listen

A powerful finish to this course (especially in Lent) could be achieved by briefing people to bring things that represent stuff they want to leave behind. Habits, attitudes, addictions over which the cross is to be victorious. With some suitable music invite people to pile them up in an appropriate corner or dump them into a bin.

Alternatively (as not all groups can cope with such drama!) ask people just to light a candle of thanks to God for the Glory of the Cross that has shone into our hearts.

Worship

Finish with a Hymn such as *"And can it be"*.

Victory & Freedom

Break into groups and share with others about an experience or situation where you could say you had “won”? Talk about what victory looks and feels like.

John 19

28 Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit

Who or what are the enemies that Jesus took on and defeated at Calvary? What was it that won the victory there?

Colossians 2

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, [d] God made you [e] alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Ephesians 6

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

1 Corinthians 15

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

What are the consequences of Christ's victory for us today?