

Holy Cross Sunday  
September 15, 2019  
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Church of the Holy Cross

Isaiah 45:21-25; Psalm 98; Philippians 2:5-11; John 12:31-36a

## **Holy Cross Day**

Happy Holy Cross day! What does Holy Cross day mean to you? Of what significance is this day? We celebrate this day together as a parish family with a picnic, and remember what it took to take The Church of the Holy Cross from a dream, to this church, this congregation. We celebrate the service and sacrifice of our founders, but chiefly, we celebrate the service and sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross.

A little history: The Feast of the Holy Cross marks the dedication of the site where the original cross and tomb of Christ was discovered by the Helena—the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine— while she was on a pilgrimage in 326. It was then ordered that a church be built on the site of the discovery. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was built and dedicated in September of 335AD. People were excited, and there was a two-day celebration. Our celebration will not last for two days. Actually, if we remember the primary reason the Gospel gives us to celebrate today, our celebration will last forever.

In the Gospel today, Jesus is primarily speaking to the Jews, but he is also sending a message that he is drawing all the world to Himself. This is one of the moments when Jesus makes it clear that He is here for everyone, the Jews, the Greeks, the Gentiles, all of us—this is our invitation to draw near Jesus. The Jews are confused, and argue that no Messiah would be lifted up—that is crucified—the law of Moses tells them that the Messiah is forever. So, they ask, “Who is this Son of Man?” Jesus tries to draw the Jews in by reminding them of what He said earlier, that He is the light of the world. *“The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.”* Jesus is calling the Jews to let go of the past, and embrace a new way of life. We all know how difficult change can be. Some would come to believe, most would have none of it. Jesus wanted them to imagine a world where all of us are sisters and brothers, following the one true light, and this meant accepting non-Jews as God’s children. It is almost an impossible dream, but it is the message of the Gospel today.

“Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Jesus was telling the disciples that the time had come to reconcile ourselves with God and each other. *“The ruler of this world,”* is often described as the devil. I could go down a rabbit hole here about the existence of evil, and argue whether demons really exist. Instead, I want to ask you the question I asked myself when I read the Gospel. What rules my world? What rules your world? What do you do daily without question? Is what you do, the same as what you feel you should be doing? What is the squeakiest wheel you pay attention to in your everyday? I know what I want to say I pay attention to everyday. I want to say that I trust God, that I want to be a child of the light and follow Jesus. Too often, I follow Jesus after I attend to my needs first.

*Abraham Maslow developed a theory called the hierarchy of needs. which puts forward that people are motivated by five basic categories of needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and*

*self-actualization. In this theory, higher needs in the hierarchy begin to emerge when people feel they have sufficiently satisfied the previous need.*

That is, once I am secure that I have enough, that I know that my needs are met, then of course, my words and actions will mirror those of Jesus. The problem is that our world always seems to leave us feeling like we need more. No matter how much we have, it almost never seems like enough.

When I am aware that I am not focused on following the light, I find myself thinking that right after I get just one more thing done, I will be following right behind Jesus. I know who I want to rule over my day, but if I do not make it my priority, I allow little time to follow the light of Christ. Instead, I spend time chasing the light reflected off the surfaces of the shiny things I want. Earthly things that make me comfortable without regard to the needs of others. I tell you, the devil is in these details.

Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate act of love. It demonstrates what it means to give yourself completely for another. That kind of act, done for us and for our salvation, should turn our hearts away from ourselves, away from reflected light and toward the true light of Christ. There is light and good in all of us, and it is meant to be shared in our words and our actions. We are children of God, children of the light, and we are called to reflect that light, and that image back onto the world.

American novelist, and Christian, Wendell Berry said it best, *"We have lived our lives by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. We have been wrong. We must change our lives so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption, that what is good for the world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to know the world and learn what is good for it."*

The thing about learning what is good for the world and then going out and doing it, is that while we are learning what is and is not good for the world, we need to survive, and thrive in our day-to-day lives. We follow a hierarchy of needs, and only then, with the time we have left over, do we engage with other people and the world and do what is best. Living in the earthly kingdom while working toward the Godly Kingdom is a tug of war—and that means there is constant tension.

We need to remember, how great the sacrifice was that Jesus made for us and for our salvation. In Philippians, Paul said we have to, *"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus."* A mind that is selfless, loving, caring, and forgiving.

With apologies to U2, *we are one, but we're not the same*, and that is what makes Jesus' sacrifice so beautiful, it is all of us that He is drawing to Himself. *Will we hurt each other, and then we do it again*, and again. What we really need to do is to *carry each other*, to love each other as Jesus loved us. We cannot escape our humanity, but we can ask *for forgiveness*, and follow the light as best we can.

Today is Holy Cross Day, a day to celebrate the love and sacrifice of Jesus, and accept our invitation to be children of the light. As Jesus stretched out his arms on the cross, let us stretch out our hands, extending hospitality and welcome everyone, just as they are, no exceptions. Because that is who we are, The Church of the Holy Cross. Together we can walk in the light, and know darkness no more, truly understanding that Love is the way. Amen.

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