

WELCOME

Lent always presents mixed emotions to me. First comes the cross and with it the passion, the suffering, the place (Calvary) or in the Latin, Calvaria, Golgotha, the place of the skull. A place of infamy. Made sacred by Christ—more about that later..... I have called this service “A sign FOR all times”. If only it were possible to call it “a sign OF the times”. We press on in our mission.

Lets begin with prayer:

Father, as we approach EASTER it is with mixed emotions that we recall what your Son did for us all. The atonement created by Jesus remains the greatest gift and through it Grace at your table. We thank you our GOD WITH HEARTS AND HANDS AND VOICES . please let it be so Father, for us your recalcitrant family, restored in Christ. Amen

HYMN (AHB) 271 by Michael Robert Newbolt 1874—1956

*Lift high the Cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world, adore his sacred name.*

1. Come people, follow where our captain trod,
Our King victorious, Christ the Son of God.
2. Led on their way, by this triumphant sign
The hosts of God in conquering ranks combine.
3. Each newborn soldier of the Crucified
Bears on his brow the seal of him who died:
4. From north and south, from east and west they raise
In growing unison their song of praise:
5. O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
As thou has promised, draw men unto thee:
6. From farthest regions, let them homage bring,
And on his cross adore their Saviour King:

BIBLE READING 1:

- Isaiah 53: vs 11-12

After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life, and be satisfied, by his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

- Luke 23: vs 32-38

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on the left. Jesus said, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said “He saved others, let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.” The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” There was a written notice above him which read “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Message 1

Yep I’m one, I’m looking for it --- The Cross, that’s what. I’m not even sure if it’s subconscious, or intentional, but most places we go I find that it’s a sign we seek. The check-out lad recently was wearing one, a gift at his first communion—well done lad. The table waitress at the coffee shop—nice to see it. Thank you. When we moved to South Korea in ’89 the view from the top of the Hyatt Hotel (our temporary home) was incredible. Seoul, a city of 13 million, capital of a Buddhist/Confucianist nation. We took in the view and were delighted to note the random sprinkling of maybe 20 or so purple crosses. A feeling of not being in such a strange place. Today the Christian faith is now about 45% of that population and growing __ (lift High the Cross!)

More importantly, what does it mean, and why is it worn? There are many wearers who see it as trinket, good luck charm, etc. Sad, but at least its being seen. Of course in a post Christian era (“Jesus still the one” by C Walker), there is, at times, a price to pay for being a part of the cross of Jesus.

In 2023, a Nurse in the UK was told to remove it or cease working there. Recently the ACT government’ on taking control of Calvary hospital near Canberra, made its first task to remove the large cross on the building. Very sad.

There can be a price to pay for being a cross bearer or cross wearer. Just like it was for our LORD. (Jude verse 3)

BIBLE READINGS 2

- ISAIAH 53 vs 1-8

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He

was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgement he was taken away, and who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.

- Luke 23 vs 44-49

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said "surely this was a righteous man." When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance, watching these things.

Message 2

The prophesy from Isaiah that the Messiah would be "a suffering servant" looms large in our faith - the call to be a servant leader. Barnabas Aid carries many reports of Christians in Nigeria and elsewhere being ridiculed even murdered for being cross bearers.

The risen Christ speaks clearly to his (possibly still puzzled) followers about suffering, and the conquest of sin through his death and resurrection: "everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Psalms".

And here we are at Lent/ Easter 2026. At the foot of the cross of Calvary (Calvaria—latin Golgotha = place of the Skull). It's worth remembering that this infamous place is at the edge of the Kidron Valley. Historically relevant. In 642BC (2 Kings 23:4) the reforming King Josiah swept through there, destroying the idols and Asherah poles in the temples of the time to bring Israel back to her God—I think it's significant that Calvary overlooks that valley (a place Jesus knew well-John 18:1).

The place of atonement to counter wickedness and claim redemption for all who accept the Cross of Christ in their life. We don't worship the Cross, of course, nor do we worship the Bible, but both are integral to Christian belief, life, and understanding. For me the Cross, and the Crucifix carry the undeniable, inextinguishable, presence of the risen, atoning Christ.

So, when I see a cross, or a cross wearer, it's a reminder of all that was done for me and for all. Alex Deminaur wears one, and its given lots of coverage through him—good for you Alex.

HYMN John Newton 1725--1807

1. Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found was blind but now I see.

A Sign For All Times

2. T'was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.
3. Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come
'tis grace has brought me thus far, and grace will lead me home.
4. The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

BLESSING: Revelation 3 vs 19-20

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline, so be earnest and repent. Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. . If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Father we ask your blessing as the remembrance of the time of your Son's gift to us draws near. Forgive us Lord for our weakness and failure to be true cross bearers. Bless us, and give us your everlasting peace.

In and through Jesus we pray.

Amen.

This service was prepared for HopeNet SA by Grant Jewell (0403 412 480)