

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home  
Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

“Though we are many, we are one body because we all share in the one loaf”. These are words from the Methodist Communion service. Sadly, as the Body of Christ at this time, we are not all able to attend church. We are not all able to gather around the Lord’s Table. Yet the Church must proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes, so our worship in church today will include an act of Holy Communion. Wherever we meet, the living Lord Jesus communes with us and he welcomes us saying, “My peace I give to you”. Come, let us worship.

Hymn/Song

Opening Prayer

God of wholeness, God of Grace, to you we bring our thanks and praise. To a world that searches you are a lamp that shines, to a world that is hungry you are food that sustains, to a world that suffers you are hope of release, to a world that’s broken you are one who restores, to a world full of hate you are love that forgives, to a world that denies you are truth that endures. To you we bring our thanks and praise, God of wholeness, God of Grace. **Amen.**

Bible Readings

Matthew Chapter 26 verses 26-29

Philippians Chapter 2 verses 5-11

Prayer of Confession

Father God, you are the one who leads us from darkness into light, from captivity into freedom, from anxiety into peace, from despair into joy. Yet we long to break free, choosing independence, convinced of our own wisdom, forgetting your love and grace. Forgive us, draw close to us, embrace us once again in your loving arms, and enable us to follow you in worship and grateful service each day of our lives.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

## Hymn/Song

### Sermon    *(You may like to find a cross to use as a visual aid)*

In our increasingly complex world, there is a need for simple symbols which everyone can understand. Symbols such as road signs, trade marks, and more recently in the age of mobile phones emoji's that are pictures which express feelings.

The simplest sign of all is the Christian cross.

It has a central place in our church and in our mission.

Today in our worship we take a closer look at the cross.

A cross is the first shape an infant can draw on paper.

It is the last shape a person might use when -because of old age - they are no longer able to sign their name.

Like the best symbols and signs it has depths of meaning behind its simplicity.

Let us look with fresh eyes at this Christian symbol and see that behind that simplicity there is much to learn.

Let us explore its depth of meaning today.

What does the cross look like?

It looks like a signpost.

It offers us two ways on the path of life.

The path of self and the path to God.

There is no middle way. We have to choose.

The cross challenges us to make up our mind.

Look at it again and it looks like the letter 'T'. 'T' is for truth.

Here we find the truth about God, the truth about humankind, the truth about life, about death, the truth about suffering, and the truth about purpose. We believe the truth that we are loved and we are forgiven because Jesus died in our place.

Look at the cross again and it is a letter 'I' crossed out.

We are naturally selfish and we have to learn to live with one another and serve one another. As St Paul wrote:

'In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus who took the nature of a servant'.

Looking at the cross, the 'I' is crossed out.

We are to die a little every day until 'I' is no longer the centre of my life – the cross is. We are to love one another as he has loved us.

Look at the cross again and it looks like a man with open arms. This surely is what Christianity is. It is not a set of rules, it is not an ideology, it is an invitation. Come to me, says Jesus and I will give you my love, my rest, my peace and my care. No one need ever feel lonely if they look at the cross. Jesus understands.

Look at the cross again and it looks like a banner. Held high it gives us a cause to follow, a set of principles to fight for, a banner raised against evil, injustice, false values and hopelessness in life. It leads us into battle against the enemy. In the words of the hymn we:

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

Look at the cross again and it looks like a sword; a weapon with which to fight. St Paul says 'Our fight is not against human foes but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and rulers of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil. The cross points to the victory in this battle.

Take one more look and we see the cross is made up of a vertical and a horizontal line.

The vertical beam is firmly embedded in this world, for Christianity is not some airy-fairy vision but rooted and grounded in human experience – it is incarnate.

And the vertical beam reaches up to the heavenly places and guides our minds up to God.

The horizontal beam reaches out to the world – for Christianity is not just a personal private faith but is a corporate faith reaching out to others.

And we notice how the vertical beam supports the horizontal beam. Our relationship with God supports our service to others.

Perhaps you can see further meanings as you look at the cross – a pair of balances – giving us a balanced view on life – the cross - a sign of our baptism that we carry.

The most obvious observation is that we see an empty cross. No figure of Christ hangs on it. We do not worship a dead figure of history but a living Lord and Saviour. Jesus bore the cross and overcame it, rising to new life. We follow where he has led.

We too have our crosses to bear – our frail bodies, our faults of character, our worries, our responsibilities, our failures, but in the end the cross is empty, for Christ is alive and offers us eternal life. We follow him past the cross to the other side, to resurrection life.

No cross, no crown.

In closing, the cross is a simple sign with depths of meaning. Christianity is very simple, a child can understand it, but it has depths no one can fully fathom or master.

Today we have taken a closer look at the cross.

With fresh eyes may we discover new meaning.

With open hearts, may we receive all the blessings that Christ has won for us and our world through his cross. Amen.

Hymn/Song

### Prayers of Intercession

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:4-7)

Let us offer our prayers with all God's people through Jesus Christ our Lord who ever lives to pray for us. We hold before God and pray for all families, especially families in need, families facing tension and division, pain and worry...

Draw near and strengthen each one.

We hold them in our hearts: **hold them in your love**

We hold before God and pray for the Church. Help every Christian to shine the light of your love where you have placed them.

We pray for our community here at Haverhill in a world of change and challenge. Guide us into new ways of service and witness.

Help us to reveal your love in all we do.

We hold them in our hearts: **hold them in your love**

We hold before God and pray for all in trouble or distress, for the sick, for those who mourn...we name them in our hearts and ask your loving presence to surround them...

We hold them in our hearts: **hold them in your love**

Let us remember and hold before God all who have died, giving thanks especially for those who have died in the faith of Christ.

We hold them in our hearts: **hold them in your love**

Finally we pray for ourselves. You hold us in your heart and you hold us in your love. We receive your love and give out hearts to you in loving service. These things we ask through Jesus Christ our crucified and risen Lord & Saviour. **Amen.**

Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray

The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/song

### The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.  
May the love of the Father, the tenderness of the Son, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, gladden your heart and bring peace to your soul, this day and all days, **Amen.**

### Coffee Time Conversation

- What is the message of Christ's cross for you today?
- What do you bring and lay at the foot of the cross today?
- Give thanks for the empty cross and a risen Saviour.

### Suggested Hymns and Songs

#### More Traditional Music:

Blessed Assurance  
How sweet the name of Jesus sounds  
When I survey the wondrous cross  
We rest on Thee our shield and our defender

#### More Contemporary Music:

Strength will rise as wait upon the Lord  
How deep the Father's love for us  
Counting Every Blessing (by Rend Collective)

Keep social distancing.  
Keep safe.  
Keep communicating.  
Keep trusting in God and standing on his great and precious promises.  
God bless you and keep you until we meet again.  
My prayers are with you.  
With love,  
Peter