

## Reflection for the Third Sunday in Lent — 1 Corinthians 1:18 by Megan Cambridge (Lay Reader)

The foolishness of the cross.

I'm sure you see it too, everywhere we look there are shop fronts and brands with symbols and logos. On the high street, the retail park, delivery vans they all have their logos. Every make of car has its own logo, breakfast cereal makers have logos and slogans even churches have logos. Countries have symbols; the Canadian maple leaf, the Welsh dragon, the Scottish thistle. The laptop I drafted this reflection on has a logo on it.



When I lead evening prayer on Zoom, I light a candle and the glass holder has a cross on it – the symbol of every Christian and of the Christian church. However, it is not only a symbol, it stands at the heart of what our faith is all about. The cross is simple in its design, even the smallest child can glue two pieces of paper together to form a cross, yet the message that lies behind that simple symbol is one that causes us to thank and praise God. Its message is simple – Jesus died on a cross. As we journey through Lent it is something that is constantly reflected on.

When a club, or an organisation or business looks for a symbol – they look for one that will inspire people, point to some meaning and purpose. The symbol is intended to draw people to their product. Choosing to hold in reverence, then, an instrument of death is a bit strange. The cross represents death. The cross speaks of defeat. The cross reflects conflict, mockery, anger, and confusion. So why do we give the cross such a place of honour in our churches? Why is the cross the central symbol of our faith? It would seem that the church should choose a much more appealing symbol than the cross. Paul calls the cross 'foolishness'. The message of Jesus' death on the cross is foolishness to the Jews who were expecting a Messiah to be someone totally different. The Greeks, the great thinkers of the world of that time, thought it all stupidity that God could die the inglorious death of a criminal at the hands of humanity. The whole idea was simply 'foolishness'.

If you have tried to explain the cross and what Jesus has achieved for us through his death and resurrection to someone who has never encountered the meaning of the cross before, you will know what Paul is talking about. The death of Jesus seems such a strange thing for God to do in order to give us forgiveness and open the way to eternal life. Reason rejects such an idea. Paul says, 'The message about Christ's death on the cross is nonsense to those who are being lost; but for us who are being saved it is God's power'.

Just because it happened a long time ago in our history, we cannot avoid it. His suffering and sacrifice were for all and for all time.

During Lent we are reminded very clearly that Jesus died on the cross because of us and to save us. He was nailed to the cross because of my sin, because of our sin. We, and the rest of humanity, are the reason why there had to be a cross in the first place. Each of us contributed to the suffering of Christ. Our sins; omission, commission, apathy and inaction, no matter how unimportant or small they may seem add up, and when Jesus took our place, when he died on the cross, they were all paid for. Perhaps that adds a new perspective to the line in the song – 'were you there when they crucified my Lord'? Well, we were! The cross is the place of rescue at that moment in time and for all time. It's the place where we see God's saving work the clearest, how far God was prepared to go to save us. As Paul says 'God has brought you into union with Christ Jesus ... By him we are put right with God; we become God's holy people and are set free' (1 Cor 30). Through the cross we are made right with God and given new lives. It was God's loving way of getting rid of all the barriers that stand between us and Himself.

When we were baptised, we were marked with the sign of the cross to show that Christ has redeemed us. At Communion, the bread and wine are marked with the sign of the cross, and we receive the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of our sin. At the end of the service, we are sent out into the world with the sign of the cross and God's blessing to do the work God has set aside for us to do. This year we missed being able to gather together on Ash Wednesday and have the cross of ashes imposed on our foreheads but we did receive the small picture of a cross and I have it stuck to the car window so it travels with me. It seems we won't be together physically to receive a palm cross this Palm Sunday but I still have one from before to wave and sing Hosanna.

St. Paul recognised that the Messiah on a cross was a scandal, a stumbling block to his fellow Jews. He knew that talk of a crucified God was tasteless, unsophisticated folly to the wisdom-loving Greeks. Without that 'foolishness', we would be lost; 'the foolishness of the cross is the power of God.'