Why the Cross?

Opening Hymn — When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Bible Reading — Luke 23:32–43 (New International Version)

32 Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. 33 When
they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the
criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. 34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them,
for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by
casting lots.

35 The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He
saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." 36 The
soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar 37 and said,
"If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

38 There was a written notice above him, which read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the
Messiah? Save yourself and us!"

40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are
under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our
deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

43 Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Scripture quotation taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Reflection — Why the Cross?

Every church has a cross. *(pause)* On the wall, on the table, around someone’s neck. We see it so often we may stop asking what it means. So this morning, let us ask the simple question — why the cross? *(pause)*

Why would God’s own Son die upon a cross? *(pause)*

Here is the first answer, and it is the heart of everything. The cross is how we know how much God loves us. *(pause)* If ever you wonder, “Does God really love *me*?” — look at the cross. That is your answer. That is how much. The Bible says it plainly: *“God shows his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* *(pause)* Not when we had it all together. Not when we were good enough. While we were still a long way off. He loved us *that* much.

There is a second answer. *(pause)* When we have lived a long life — and many of us here have — we gather things along the way. Regrets. Things we wish we had done differently. Words we wish we could take back. We carry them quietly, and they grow heavy. *(pause)*

The cross is where Jesus took all of that. Every wrong thing, every heavy thing, every secret we have carried for years — he took it upon himself, there on the cross. As they nailed him there, he said, *“Father, forgive them.”* *(pause)* Forgive them. That was his heart even then. *(pause)* And so you can lay the heavy load down. You do not have to carry it to the end. The cross means it is forgiven. *(pause)*

There is a third answer, and it is a tender one. *(pause)* Jesus on the cross was in pain. He was weak. He felt alone. He knew what it was to suffer in the body. *(pause)* So when you are in pain, when the days are hard,

when you feel the world has forgotten you — you are not praying to a God who stands far off and does not understand. You are speaking to One who has *been there*. He knows. He is close to the suffering, because he suffered too. *(pause)*

And let me tell you the most hopeful thing of all. *(pause)* When Jesus was crucified, there was a dying man on a cross beside him. A man at the very end of his life, with nothing left to offer — no good deeds, no time to make amends, nothing at all in his hands. *(pause)* And he simply turned his head and said, "Jesus, remember me." *(pause)* And Jesus said to him, *"Today you will be with me in paradise."* *(pause)*

That very day. No long list of conditions. Just a man at the end, turning to Jesus — and being welcomed home. *(pause)* And that same welcome is for you. At any age. From any chair. From any bed. It is never, ever too late to say, "Jesus, remember me." *(pause)*

So why the cross? *(pause)* Because God so loved you that he would not leave you in your sin. He would not leave you in your fear. He would not leave you alone in your suffering. And he would not leave you in death. *(pause)* For the cross was not the end of the story. Three days later the tomb was empty. Jesus rose. And because he lives, death is not a wall — it is a doorway. *(pause)*

The last words Jesus spoke from the cross were these: *"It is finished."* *(pause)* The work is done. There is nothing left for you to earn. You have only to receive it. *(pause)*

That is why the cross. It is God saying to you, by name: *I will come all the way down to where you are. And I will bring you home.* *(pause)*

May that love hold you today, and every day, and at the very last. *(pause)*

Amen.

Closing Hymn — Rock of Ages

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure;
Save from wrath and make me pure.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.