

Sermon  
Holy Cross Day  
Sunday, September 14th 2025  
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa  
The Reverend Victoria Scott  
Readings: NUMBERS 21:4B-9; PSALM 98:1-6; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-24; JOHN  
3:13-17

My brother, Paul, is four years younger than I am. When he was a toddler, he took some group music lessons on percussion instruments. My parents and I went with him to the first lesson, and we were shown into a room with a mirror that took up most of one wall. Once Paul was settled in front of a xylophone, we were invited to leave the room. We walked out of one door, and through another one, and to my amazement, I found that we were in another room, with a huge window, and looking through that window, I could see my brother! That mirror was a two-way mirror. I have never forgotten the feeling of wonder at this. What I had been quite certain was a mirror - why would I think otherwise? - was also a window.

Today is Holy Cross Day. This is a day when we reflect on the cross. What does this central symbol of our lives as Christians, as followers of Jesus, mean to us? Anglicans tend to favour an empty cross as symbol rather than a crucifix with the figure of Jesus on it. This allows for different views of the cross, for different reflections on its meaning in our lives. Yes, we have the cross of Good Friday, we have Jesus's suffering and death as part of our faith, always, but we also always have the cross of the Resurrection. We have the cross transformed from an instrument of torture to a sign of salvation – to a reminder that death is not the end, reminding us that God's love is stronger than death, stronger than anything!

Some time ago Canon Pat Johnson - who was here at Ascension with you before I arrived in 2022 - preached a sermon that has stayed with me. She invited us to see the cross as a mirror. She asked us what we saw, in ourselves, when we fixed our gaze on that reflection.

What do our lives and our habits and practices look like reflected in the cross? What do our interactions and our relationships look like?

What if it's more than a mirror, though? What if the cross is like that two-way mirror in my brother's music classroom? Both a mirror and a window? What if Jesus fixed his gaze on the cross, knowing that it was not only a mirror for what was happening in first century Jerusalem, but that it was also a window through which God's loving gaze was fixed on him, and on all the world? What if

Jesus's willingness to keep his face turned to Jerusalem and the cross was to show us that there is a window on the other side of the mirror of the cross, through which God's loving gaze is fixed on us, and on all of creation? Fixed on us with longing for relationship with us, hoping for us to join in with God's mission as only we can?

The Gospel appointed for today brings us the famous verse, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world...". "The world". It's easy for us to limit our understanding of God loving the world. It's easy to think that it's about us, about humanity. Many interpretations of this passage have made this about personal salvation. The word that is translated "world" is "kosmos", though. This word means so much more than, say, the word "paß", or "pas," which is sometimes translated "world" and means "each, all, everyone". Kosmos, means the whole order of earth and its inhabitants, not just humans, not just human endeavours, but all that this universe holds: stars, planets, mountains, seas, creatures, plants, pebbles, sand. And not just the stuff of the universe, but the relationships, the systems, the interplay of days, tides, seasons. This is an invitation to broaden our view, our perspective. It's an invitation to open our hearts and minds to the expansiveness of God's love. For God so loved the kosmos – all of it – that he gave his only Son for the kosmos – and to save the kosmos through him.

If we broaden our view in that mirror of the cross to include the reflection of what is happening in our world around us, that view can be difficult to take in. We'll see conflict, and violence. We'll see disconnection and dysfunction. We'll see oppression, suffering. What are we to do with that reflection? How are we to join with God's mission of love when we see this conflict and violence, this dysfunction?

I always remember Archbishop Desmond Tutu's words about our participation in this earthly life of ours: "We, without God, can't. God, without us, won't". Jesus came to show us what that participation looks like, and as followers of Jesus it's up to us to join with God's mission of love, and healing, and repair in the world as only we can.

I've just finished reading progressive political commentator and author Sally's Kohn's book "The Opposite of Hate: \_\_\_\_\_". I commend this book to you – and I'll include a link in this week's newsletter. Sally Kohn shows in this book that the opposite of hate is connection. The way of Jesus shows us that our way to participate with God in God's mission of love in this world is connection. It's not about connection that glosses over issues for the sake of peace, it's about connection that has us recognize opposites and not rush to reconcile them. It's about connection that has us willing to take a good look at what holds us back from participating fully with God already at work in the world. To be willing to

hold it all and in the holding to be stretched and changed until a new way becomes clear. Jesus was willing to hold it all. He stretched out his arms on the cross and held it all, and in doing this he showed us that there is another way: a way of connection, a way of love. It is a way of connection and love that will save our world.

What is reflected in the mirror of the cross here at Ascension? As I said last week, I give thanks that our visioning process so far has us looking in the mirror of the cross and seeing one another and wanting to get to know each other better. I give thanks that we're seeing the neighbourhood reflected in the mirror of the cross, and I can feel God watching through the window on the other side, with us, waiting for us to see where and when and how to join in God's mission here in and around this place, waiting for us to move with the Spirit as only we can.

Our Anglican tradition is full of rich imagery, ritual, and symbol. The cross, that central symbol of our faith as followers of Jesus is a powerful reminder of the potential and possibility in the way of Jesus. You received a small origami cross on your way in today – if you didn't get one, there are more at the back. I made these with love and prayers for you all. Take this cross with you as a reminder to fix your gaze on the mirror of the cross. Be reminded that God is looking at you with love through the window on the other side. Take it with you as a reminder that just as this little cross is made with a series of folds - a series of connections - it is connection that is our way to unfold the Gospel in the world. What do you see reflected in your day-to-day life? What potential and possibility do you see in that reflection? What ways of joining with God's mission are revealed to you in that reflection? What ways can you see God already at work? The Spirit already moving? As you look in the mirror of the cross, know that God's gaze is fixed on you with love. God's gaze is fixed on you, radiating love and grace, waiting for you – waiting for all of us – to choose connection, to choose love. In Jesus name. Amen.