

## Holy Cross Sunday – September 14, 2025

### Season of Creation

### Homecoming Sunday

Philippians 2:5-11

John 12:31-36a

## The Cross: Where the Timbers Meet

*A sermon preached by The Rev. Dianne Andrews at  
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Bainbridge Island, WA.*

*Jesus said:*

*“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.”*



This is a big Sunday here at St. Barnabas! Today, as students are back in school and many summer vacations have been accomplished, we are celebrating fall Homecoming and the start of our program year. Today, we are initiating a new Sunday morning schedule, with a half hour shift in the start time of the second service, that will allow for a space for learning and deepening ties of fellowship between services. This morning, that new space between services allows us to come together for an all-parish breakfast and Ministry Fair. The point of this change is to improve communication, fellowship, and accessibility to learning opportunities. Your vestry has approved this change with the understanding that the new schedule is a trial run... and that you... the people of St. Barnabas... will be able to weigh-in about the schedule changes at the Parish Annual Meeting on February 1. This interim time, between rectors, offers an opportunity shift things up a bit and try new things for the purpose of renewing connections and inviting new life. I like the image of tilling the soil in preparation for the sprouts that will be emerging in the new chapters that are to unfold in the life of St. Barnabas.

In our worship today, we are celebrating a central symbol of our Christian faith. On this Holy Cross Sunday, we are also ushering in a Season of Creation that will conclude on October 5 when we will celebrate St. Francis and bless our furry companions. I say this with the full recognition that a focus on creation is not meant for one Sunday or one season. As God’s people who have been entrusted with the stewardship of the earth, the air, the waters and all the plants and creatures that God created out of love... creation care is to be woven into all aspects of our faith life, just as care for one another and for the least among us is central to the praxis... to the living out of our faith. So let us see how we can weave these various threads together as we ponder the meaning of the cross on this new day.

For some historical perspective, the origins of the Feast of the Holy Cross reach back to the year 326, nearly three centuries after Jesus’ death. In that year, the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, Helen, travelled to the Holy Land to visit holy sites. The story goes that she found a fragment of the true cross, the implement of torture and death upon which Jesus breathed his last.

The cross fragment was taken to Rome and then back in Jerusalem where construction on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre began... on the spot believed to be the actual place of Jesus' execution and burial. In the Middle Ages, when the sale and veneration of religious relics was rampant, there were probably so many pieces of the "true" cross circulating in Europe that a whole cathedral might have been constructed from the numerous fragments... but that is beside the point. The origins of the Feast of the Holy Cross go back to the discovery of what is thought to be the "true cross." For today, it is for us to consider what the symbol of the cross means for us in our time and place.

When we come to church to worship, some of us find meaning in bowing before the cross or making the sign of the cross. Some of us wear the symbol of the cross on our bodies in the form of jewelry. Some of us may even have a cross tattooed on our bodies. The cross is a symbol that identifies its wearer as a Christian. Crosses are everywhere. But, without a doubt, the cross will have different meanings to different people. This religious symbol, that represents belonging to some... may... to others, be experienced as a symbol of exclusion and even oppression. Think of the medieval crusades and the bloodshed that followed in the wake cross-wearing crusaders, or of more recent occurrences of crosses being used to intimidate... think of the burning crosses being used as an endorsement of white Christian supremacy and violence. The most fundamental understanding of the symbol of the cross is that it represents God's big love. The words "salvation" and "redemption" are associated with Jesus' great sacrifice on the cross. For some, Jesus' blood is a symbol of redemption for the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. It is important to recognize, however, that the doctrine of Original Sin wasn't fully articulated until St. Augustine did so in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. A more modern interpretation of Jesus' death on the cross was offered by Marcus Borg who believed that, rather than a blood ransom or blood atonement for original sin, Jesus stood up to the imperial powers of Rome who were menacing God's people. In the face of impending death, Jesus headed straight towards Jerusalem and the earthly consequences that awaited him there. Jesus did not back down. In Borg's interpretation, Jesus died for us, but not as a blood atonement. Jesus' sacrifice was made in fierce love and justice for all God's people.

Very basically, the cross is a reminder of the painful reality of Good Friday that is a precursor to Easter. Through the great paschal mystery, through the great journey from Friday to Resurrection Sunday... all things are made new. Ideally, we can look to the cross as the place... the intersection... where death and new life meet. We come out the other side of the heart-breaking experience of Good Friday... into the dawn of Easter Sunday... where we may see with new eyes and have larger hearts with which to love... and care... and serve. Most basically, the cross is a symbol of transformation and new life achieved through God's great love shown us in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

God knows, and we know, that all is not well and healed in our world. Remembering that the cross calls us to be a people of the resurrection, let us, for a moment, go to the foot of the cross to remember the Good Fridays that are being experienced in this very moment. Our hope is in the resurrection... that calls all people and the whole of creation to new life and into healthy relationships. The foot of the cross is where our hearts are broken and where God weeps. In this very moment, Jesus continues to be crucified in all corners of the earth, in every place where the dignity of another human being is denied and where concern for the welfare of the planet and her creatures is being ignored.

- Good Friday is being experienced by the victims of disasters that are unnatural events, caused by humanity's unwillingness to make changes needed to care well for God's creation and God's creatures.... Good Friday is being experienced by the victims of voracious tornados, hurricanes, fires, droughts, and floods...
- Good Friday is being experienced by those without a home, those who are fleeing their homes to escape violence, for those grieving the loss of their homeland, for those who have known fear, violence and imprisonment because of broken immigration systems....
- Good Friday is being experienced by the victims of gun violence, the families who have lost precious loved ones, and by children who live in fear...
- Good Friday is being known in the oceans where coral reefs are dying, extinctions are happening, and ecosystems are being disrupted.
- Good Friday is being experienced by those struggling with addiction and the families and communities affected by addiction.
- Good Friday is being experienced by all those living in a hellscape of war...

For all Good Friday experiences... God weeps...

In the depths of heartache, it is important to remember that... beyond the cross... the rays of the Easter dawn are seeking to break into our world. In fleeting moments we catch a glimpse. As an Easter people, we have been empowered to do our part to as healers in the world. As a people of the resurrection, we are to live in the light and strength of the cross, and to live as a people, beloved of God, caring for one another and for the good creation which God had made.

*Jesus said:*

*"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself."*

The story of Jesus did not end with his death. We have gathered here together this day to worship our God of new life known in Christ Jesus, in whose resurrection the shackles of death were shattered. From the depths of grief and loss... new life is given. Beneath the cross, we share the holy feast... a gift given to us by Jesus himself... that we may be strengthened by Christ's presence known to us in consecrated bread and wine and in the community we share. Beneath the cross... we are called to care for all we have been given, for creation, for our neighbors, and especially those in need. Beneath the cross... we are to know abundant life... and the truth we so desperately long for... that ... "...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

*Amen...*

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:37-39