

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 3rd March 2024

Prepared by the Revd Kate Cambridge

Welcome to this week's service at home sheet for the third Sunday in Lent. May we know God's presence with us wherever we worship, as we continue to reflect on God's boundless love for us and journey with Jesus towards the cross.

Listen, read, pray or sing along to STF 409 Let us build a house [All Are Welcome \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uj8v8v8v8v8)

Let us build a house
where love can dwell
And all can safely live,
A place where
saints and children tell
How hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
Rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions;
*All are welcome, all are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
And words are strong and true,
Where all God's children dare to seek
To dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness
And a symbol of God's grace;
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

Let us build a house where love is found
In water, wine and wheat:
A banquet hall on holy ground,
Where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus,
Is revealed in time and space;
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us:
Marty Haugen b. 1950

Prayer of Approach

Take a moment of silence to open yourself to God. Give God the joys, anxieties and sorrows of this past week. Entrust these to God, and this time of worship, trusting that God will meet with you and hears your praise and your prayers.

We pray:

Gracious God, whose love surrounds and enfolds us, wherever we may be, may our words, thoughts and prayers be pleasing to you today. Meet with us as we worship. May we know your presence and hear your voice. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Introduction to the readings

We have two readings to reflect on today. The first from Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church, reminds us of the central message of the gospel as we look to the cross. Then in John's gospel, as Jesus' cleanses the temple, he points forward to his death and resurrection.

Read 1 Corinthians 1.18-25

Read John 2.13-22

Reflection

'For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.'
(1 Corinthians 1.22-25)



[Alexamenos](#)

[graffito - Wikipedia](#) (stone rubbing trace of the drawing)

In 1857, a piece of Roman graffiti was found scratched in plaster on the wall of a room near the Palatine Hill in Rome. The house, acquired by the Emperor Caligula for an Imperial palace, was used after his death as a boarding school for page boys. The graffiti depicts a human like figure attached to a cross, with the head of a donkey. To the left of the image a young man stands with his hand raised. The inscription reads 'Alexamenos worships his god.'

You don't have to look far in a Christian church to see a cross; we place one on the communion table, perhaps hang one on the wall, and embroider crosses into kneeler cushions and wall hangings. Many Christians wear a cross around their neck, or as a lapel badge. Perhaps at home the same is true – if you choose to wear a cross, or have a standing or holding cross at home to help you pray. What is it about the cross, as a Christian symbol, that has made it stand the test of time? Other Christian symbols have been used and are used today – but above them all is the symbol of the cross.

If you have a cross at home, you might like to find it now – and look at it or hold it. What is it about the cross that makes it so important? The cross was a symbol of death, crime and shame. Crucifixion – death on a cross – was a horrendous form of execution which deliberately delayed death until maximum torture had been imposed – the victim could suffer for days before dying. The Romans generally reserved it for criminals convicted of murder, rebellion or armed robbery – as long as they were foreigners, slaves or others considered non-persons. Roman citizens were exempt from crucifixion. Jews also regarded the cross with horror – in Deuteronomy 21.23 we are told 'anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse' – and because Jews did not make a distinction between a tree or a cross, they believed that to be crucified was to die under God's curse.

Imagine then how inconceivable it seems that God's Messiah, Jesus, should die on a cross – apparently under a curse – and that people would choose to follow a crucified Messiah, and to wear the cross as a symbol to remind them. Alexamenos

knew what it meant to be ridiculed for his belief in a 'crucified God'.

Yet, for the apostle Paul, the 'message of the cross' or 'the word of the cross' is the gospel of Christ crucified (1 Cor 1.18). This sums up the whole gospel. Although a 'stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles', we proclaim Christ crucified, who is, for those who are called, 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.'

Towards the beginning of John's gospel, the story we read today has Jesus cleansing the temple, driving out those who were selling cattle, sheep, doves – and the money changers. When asked what sign he could show for doing this, Jesus replied, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' (John 2.19) Jesus was of course talking of his body as the temple, and referring to his death and resurrection.

Through Lent, through our Scripture readings and prayers, we move towards the events of Holy Week and remember Jesus' death for us, on the cross. It is a focus of our worship – Christians are not ashamed to proclaim Christ's crucifixion. It is not for us a source of shame or a sign of weakness, but it reveals for us the power and wisdom of God, the means for our salvation.

We may try to prove God through our own wisdom and reason – but the way to true knowledge of God is by revelation alone. God's love is shown pre-eminently in Christ's death for us – through whom God saves those who believe.

In the epistle to the Romans, Paul puts it in this way:

'For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.' (Romans 5.6-8)

Although this message may seem like foolishness and may be a stumbling block to some, we are called to align ourselves with Alexamenos and

worship our crucified Saviour. There is a very good reason that the cross is a key symbol of our Christian faith. May we never forget it.

To ponder

What does it mean for you to hold or look upon the cross, and to reflect on what Jesus did for us?

Do you find it difficult to understand the death of Jesus?

Why not read through one of the Passion narratives as you prepare for Holy Week – and pray that God would show you again the truth of what Jesus has done for us, and reveal to you his heart of love for you and for the world.

Bryn Haworth reflect on the love of God and the forgiveness offered to us, through Christ's sacrifice, in the words of our next song.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along STF 286 [What Kind of Love Is This \(youtube.com\)](#)

What kind of love is this
that gave itself for me?
I am the guilty one,
yet I go free.

What kind of love is this,
a love I've never known;
I didn't even know his name -
what kind of love is this?

What kind of man is this,
that died in agony?
He who had done no wrong
was crucified for me.

What kind of Man is this,
who laid aside His throne
That I may know the love of God -
What kind of man is this?

By grace I have been saved;
it is the gift of God.
He destined me to be his own,
such is His love

No eye has ever seen,
no ear has ever heard,
nor has the human heart conceived
what kind of love is this?

Songwriters: Bryn Haworth, Sally Haworth. For non-commercial use only.

Lent Petition (From *Prayers for All Seasons p. 85*)

Loving God,
We remember today how much Christ loved us,
how much he was willing to sacrifice
and endure for our sakes.

Teach us to follow.

You set before him the need to choose –
between the way of self and the way of the cross,
the way of the world and the way of love,
the way of life that leads to death
and the way of death that leads to life.

Teach us to follow.

We thank you for the choice he made,
and all that lay behind it –
the faith that gave him the inner strength
to resist temptation and accept your will,
the courage to take the path of suffering and
death, the love which guided all.

Teach us to follow.

Forgive us that having received so much from him
we give so little in return.
we are self-centred,
putting ourselves before others and before you,
shying away from sacrifice and self-denial.

Teach us to follow.

We are narrow in our vision,
more concerned with earthly satisfaction
than spiritual fulfilment,
taking the easy, comfortable way
rather than the way of Christ.

Teach us to follow.

Loving God,
once more, we pray, assure us of your constant
mercy, once more cleanse and renew our hearts,
once more give us strength, faith and courage
to follow where you would lead us.

Teach us to follow.

Teach us to hunger and thirst for righteousness,
knowing that you are able to fill us;
to trust in you always, come what may,
knowing your love will never fail us;
to offer you our worship
through all we are and all we do,
knowing you alone are God.

Teach us to follow.

Loving God, lead us when our time of trial comes,
when we are faced by the need to choose,
and deliver us from evil.

Teach us to follow, in the name of Christ, Amen.

Prayers for others

We pray today for those who suffer for their faith
in Jesus – for persecuted Christians around the
world – and others who are persecuted for their
religious or political beliefs.

We pray for those across the world who are
suffering from the effects of poverty, climate
change, or living in places of conflict, for hope,
God's provision and peace. We pray for those who
work to relieve suffering and those who work for
peace.

We pray for those known to us who are going
through difficult times, for those in need of
healing, for all who are mourning, who need to
know God's loving presence with them.

We pray for ourselves, as we seek to follow Jesus
and walk the way of the cross, bringing our own
needs before God and with thankfulness that God
has promised to be with us, no matter how life may
be for us now.

We bring ourselves and the gift which we bring,
praying that all may be used to spread the good
news of the gospel, to the glory of God.

After silent prayer, we say the prayer Jesus taught
us:

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along STF247 I danced in the morning [Lord of the Dance Hymn](#)

I danced in the morning when the world was begun
I danced in the Moon & the Stars & the Sun
I came down from Heaven & I danced on Earth
At Bethlehem I had my birth:

*Dance then, wherever you may be
I am the Lord of the Dance, said He!
And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be
And I'll lead you all in the Dance, said He!*

I danced for the Scribe & the Pharisee
But they would not dance & they wouldn't follow
me

I danced for fishermen, for James & John
They came with me & the Dance went on:

I danced on the Sabbath & I cured the lame
The holy people said it was a shame!
They whipped & they stripped & they hung me
high
And they left me there on a cross to die!

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black
It's hard to dance with the devil on your back
They buried my body & they thought I'd gone
But I am the Dance & I still go on!

They cut me down and I leapt up high
I am the Life that'll never, never die!
I'll live in you if you'll live in Me -
I am the Lord of the Dance, said He!
Sydney Carter (1915-2004)

Closing Blessing

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and
Holy Spirit, be with us and those who we love and
prayer for, now and always. Amen.

*Material used from Prayers for All Seasons, Nick Fawcett
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