

Heavenly Father, as we ponder scripture, by your Holy Spirit, enable us see the power of the cross in daily life. Amen.

- *‘Jesus said, ‘Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – “Father, save me from this hour”?’*. Jesus was facing the cross. That was his hour. That’s what he was talking about when he says a few verses later, *‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’* He will be *‘lifted up’* on the cross. This is just a couple of days before the Last Supper, Judas may already have made an unholy alliance with the temple priests to betray Jesus. The cross was staring him firmly in the face.
- And Jesus says, *“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – “Father, save me from this hour”?”*.
- That was Jesus’s hour. What hour are you in? Are you facing worry and uncertainty? Are you plodding on day by day, without thinking too much? Are you trusting in Jesus, so that though we are in somewhat insecure times you are feeling nurtured and safe? Has lockdown been good to you or are storm clouds gathering as you wonder how you are possibly going to face the next 6 months, let alone the next 6 years? The money. The loneliness. The children. The future is often scary! Is your soul troubled or at peace?
- *‘Jesus said, ‘Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – “Father, save me from this hour”?’*.
- This must have been a real prayer of Jesus and he must have expressed his uncertainty and understandable fear at what lay ahead because it is chronicled so many times in the bible. Can you blame him that his *‘soul is troubled’*? Quite apart from his anguished prayer in Gethsemane, or these words in John, it’s also there in this morning’s reading from Hebrews, *‘Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death’*. That was Jesus’ hour. The troubled soul was part of his cross to bear.
- What hour are you in? And looking at it from the standpoint of where you are now, was Jesus successful? When he was *‘lifted up from the earth,’* did he *‘draw’* you to himself? Has his death made any difference to your Covid affected life in 2021?
- Many people would say that Jesus had not been successful. He had been deluded. His death had made no difference. After all how does the death of one, albeit good, man 2 000 years ago make any difference to the unemployment figures today and the speed in which the vaccine is rolled out? Many people do not feel drawn to Jesus when he doesn’t give them what they want.
- Many others would say that Jesus was successful but only as the promise of something better at some point in the future. You get to heaven when you die, but life on earth is still not that wonderful! Jesus was successful but you’ve got to wait for it. Many people acknowledge Jesus and then park him on a shelf marked, *‘much later’*. He does not seem to make life much better at the moment.
- And indeed we are faced with a pandemic that is not going away speedily; very unsettled nations in the world that could explode into insurrection at any moment; stories of terrible suffering from Syria, Yemen and now Ethiopia. Which will be the next forgotten country to raise a headline? An increasing number of dictatorial regimes – what is the latest news from Myanmar for example? A future global recession on unprecedented scale and a planet that if we are to believe the scientific data, is shortly going to self-destruct.
- What can Jesus’s death say to all this that shows some sort of success? I am going to attempt an answer!
- Jesus said, *‘I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.’* God’s greatest attribute is surely love. He loves his creation. He loves you and me. That must be the most basic of Christian beliefs. We believe in a good God who made us and who loves us.
- He also sees the mess human beings make of living together. If you feel compassionate as a result of hearing that list of world woes just now, think of the depth of compassionate love that God must feel. Must feel today, but must also have felt for the last 5 000 years or however long human beings have been capable of rational thought. It’s certainly not that we’re worse now than we were a few thousand years ago, but it would also be certain that it’s hard to say that we are any better.
- God’s plan has always been to reunite heaven and earth and he has always planned since the beginning of time to do it through Jesus.

- He prepared the way by choosing a people and giving them a pattern to express their desire to come back to God, to show their love for him, if you like. It was through the Jewish temple. It was through sacrifice. The High priest sacrificed your unblemished lamb, the best one you could afford, in order to demonstrate your love. It healed the relationship between you and God and brought you close together. It was very personal. My lamb would be of no use to you. It was no sacrifice of yours. I had paid for it. It was my sacrifice. You need to pay for your own. Hands off!! All that was to lead us to another sacrificial victim, Jesus Christ.
- In Jesus we have God travelling close to prove his love for us, rather than our love for him. In Jesus we have an unblemished sacrifice offered for us, the best one his Father could afford. The High Priest sacrificed himself on the cross. Jesus is *'a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchizedek.'* Remember Melchizedek from a few weeks ago? As Hebrews says, *'having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him'*. That's the cross in a nutshell!
- *'having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him'*. Perhaps those who don't think Jesus was successful are those who don't obey him, who don't turn to him?
- Now, at some point we will all be hauled before the judgement seat and meet Jesus face to face, and I can't think there will be many who will not turn to him at that point and obey him and receive eternal salvation. But you and I have already turned to him, we do our poor best to obey him, to show our love for him in response to his love for us. Is there any eternal salvation for us today? Is Jesus's cross successful for us in 2021? .. A little story.
- There was a mythical, but typical family living in a town in Britain of your choice. They were working their way through lockdown as best they could, grinding through each day. Home educating was a nightmare but they did their best. Money was tight but at least one of the adults had a job. They were pinning their hopes on a holiday in the summer and a chance to see their friends.
  - Sadly disaster struck. The wage earner lost their job, a grandparent contracted Covid and died and one of the adults descended into a worrying depression. The book of Job on a bad day!
- Those who do not obey Jesus would look to this as yet another proof that his life and death were irrelevant
- Others might try to offer comfort by saying, that their sufferings would eventually come to an end and it would all work out ok in heaven where they would live happily ever after. Is that comfort? Well, a tad perhaps, but it could just as easily lead to the desire to thump the pious comforter as you shout about the gas bill!
- But as the months drew on, the family discovered some good friends who do not abandon them. They also discovered a greater understanding and compassion for other people in the same boat. It made them reappraise their own values. It's not what you've got that is important, it's how you live. And if they managed to connect to some sort of Christian faith in their hour of distress they might even discover that God had a calling for them that was so very different from the path they had been following. If you ask me that's living through the cross and perceiving the new life of the resurrection.
- For that family, living in that way, Jesus' cross was very definitely successful today. In 2021. They did not have to wait to see the love of God in action. And you may say that the end result was unlikely and could have been very different. And I would answer, and the bible would answer, that the crowning glory of the story was the discovery of God. That was what indubitably turned defeat into success. That was what managed to turn the world from an adversary to be defeated into a victim to be saved. Does that speak to you?
- So is Jesus a success? It depends from what standpoint you look at him!
- Jesus was facing his hour. What hour are you in? The world is in a very parlous hour. If you want to wrestle with how to bring the cross of Christ into a successful relationship with some of the issues of today then pick one almost at random. For instance consider the rollout of vaccines. When did you last hear anyone mention vaccines being provided for the most needy nations in the world? It seems all to have gone deathly quiet. Instead we hear about spats between Britain and Europe and threats of withholding of vaccines from each other. What would you like to see happening? What should the Church be saying? And would you be prepared to wait, so that someone in Sudan got inoculated before you? And have you made a donation to the Covid fund? That's bringing the cross starkly into daily life. Today. Amen!