

3 – THE CROSS

AIM: TO HELP YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND WHY JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SINS

INTRODUCTION



The cross can be considered the logo of Christianity. The cross is a symbol for the death of Jesus.

If you think about it, it is a bit weird how we wear crosses around our necks to represent our religion.

Most famous people are remembered for the great events in their lives. But Jesus, the most famous person in history came to his remembrance most of

PAGE 1B

If you think about it, the cross is a weird thing to represent an entire religion. Has it ever struck you that in a way it's quite a surprising thing to do because the cross was a form of execution?

Most leaders who have influenced nations or, even changed the world, are known for the impact of their lives. Jesus, who more than any other person changed the face of world history, is remembered for his death even more than his life. Why does Jesus' death matter to us today? What is the difference between his death and the death of, say, a war hero or a martyr? Why did he die? What did it achieve? Why is it important?

An expression appears in the New Testament: 'HE DIED FOR OUR SINS': What does that mean? How can it be relevant to your child's life or your life?

Why did Jesus die? Because God loves you. That is the reason for the cross; it is God's amazing love for you on display. In this session we are going to discover why.

LET'S REMEMBER WHO GOD IS

JESUS IS GOD



All of the amazing things that Jesus said, did, taught and said about himself show us that he was more than just a good man, that he was God.

By becoming human, Jesus shows us even just through his birth how much God loves us, how much he cares about us and how much he wants us to know that.

Remember, God is not a man sitting on a cloud with a long beard looking down at us, slightly disappointed and so that is why he sent his son. God became man in Jesus so that we

PAGE 26A

Page 26 is a key page of the handout.

As we discovered in the last session, all of the amazing things that Jesus did, taught and said about himself show us that he was more than just a good man, that he was, in fact, God.

If you think about it by becoming human, Jesus shows us even just through his birth how much God loves us, how much he cares about us and how much he wants us to know that.

We recommend spending a moment talking about that with your child when you are on this page. You can find a summary of this section on page 11 of the Parent Booklet.

Before we talk about the cross, we need to remember and remind our children, that God is not a man sitting on a cloud with a long beard looking down at us. We need to remove the image of a vengeful God looking down at humanity in disappointment.

But you can understand how that image of God has been able to take root. And you can understand why the idea of the cross can become problematic for some of us as a result of that.

God became a man in Jesus so that we can know how much he loves us. **Faith, believing that God loves us, is meant to change us.** We are meant to see a change in how we see ourselves and others. We are meant to see a change in our choices and how we live.

We experience this all the time – as parents we know that love changes us. Only love—not duress, guilt, any form of shunning, or social pressure—effects true inner transformation.

Jesus did not come to change God’s mind about us. He came so that we could change our minds about God.

JESUS BELIEVED IN CHANGE

The first public word out of Jesus’ mouth translates into the Greek “*metanoete*”, which means “change your mind”. “FROM THAT TIME JESUS BEGAN TO PROCLAIM, ‘REPENT, FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN HAS COME NEAR.’ (MATTHEW 4:17)

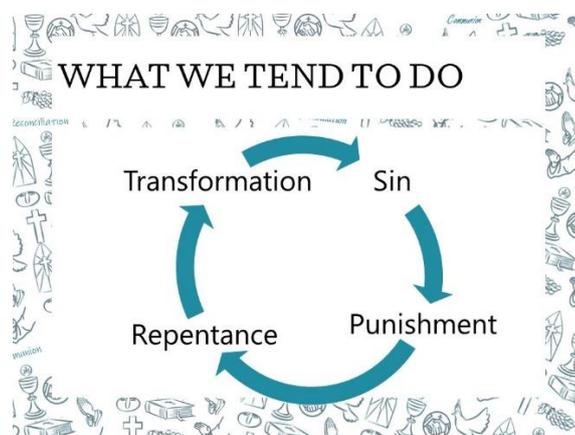
Unfortunately, in the fourth century, St. Jerome translated the word into Latin as “*paenitentia*” (“repent” or “do penance”), which initiated an almost obsessive moralistic agenda in the Church. It now became all about the externalised signs of holiness. The problem with that is that we can change a few externals without changing the way we think. **So we can go along with programmes for the sacraments and even receive the sacraments and never actually change our minds about anything.**

In the 4th Century and to this day, faith became about external requirements that could be enforced, punished, and rewarded, much more than an actual change of heart and mind, which Jesus described as something that largely happens “IN SECRET, WHERE YOUR FATHER WHO SEES IN SECRET CAN REWARD YOU” (MATTHEW 6:4, 6, 18).

Jesus didn’t focus on individual sin outside or over there, where we can point to it, punish it, and try to change it. That is too easy and mostly ineffective.

Jesus emphasised inner motivation and interior change more than visible behaviours or rituals or anything that would have a social payoff or punishment.

This is the pattern we expect: sin > punishment > repentance > transformation.

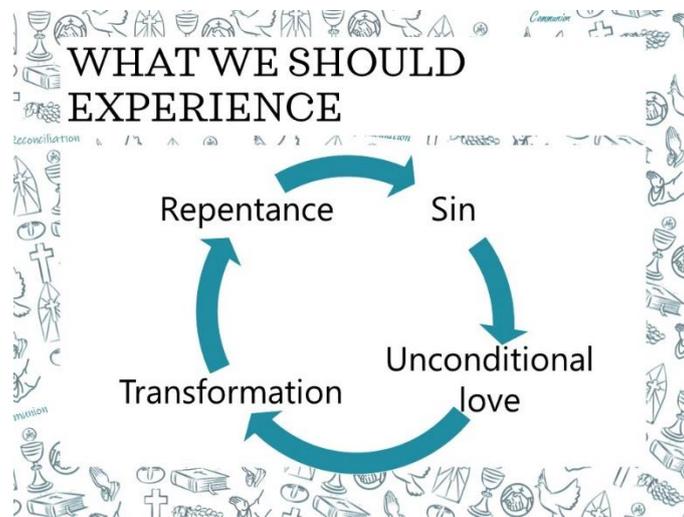


With this pattern we accept that we fall short, then we need to be punished for it, and then we need to turn back to God and then and only then, after jumping through all these hoops, can transformation take place.

Transformation is nothing to do with anything external. Transformation means only this: to accept that God loves me.

Jesus came so that we could change our minds about ourselves (that we are loved) and each other (that they are loved).

The pattern now becomes: sin > unconditional love and forgiveness > transformation > repentance.



The Church gives us the rituals and Jesus has given us the sacraments (particularly reconciliation) to help us experience this cycle. Remember, God became man in Jesus so that we can know how much he loves us and it's from that position we should consider everything else.

We're going to spend some time now in our small groups having a chat about what you've just heard. Afterwards, I'd like to hear some of things you chatted about.

WHY DID JESUS DIE?

Here is something we say all the time. That Jesus died for our sins. That in the Cross of Christ, we are saved. But what does it mean, precisely?

If you're in the army and a colleague of yours throws himself on a live grenade and saves your life by giving his own, well, yeah, that's very clear. He gave his life for me. He saved me by his death.

Or if a mother, let's say, donates an organ for a child and in that process, she dies, we would say she sacrificed her life to save her child.

WHY DID JESUS DIE?

“he humbled himself & became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.”
Philippians 2:8

Scapegoat is one made to bear the blame for the wrongs of others.



Jesus died on the cross because the authorities at the time did not like what he was saying or doing. So, they made him the scapegoat and had him killed.

On the cross, all human sin met Jesus: like greed, envy, hate, anger, violence. Jesus was sinless and did not deserve to die, yet he took that all sin on himself and was overwhelmed by it and died.

But then the most surprising thing happened. Three days later, Jesus was alive again! They killed him, but he came back to life even better than he was before.

PAGE 2B

But Jesus died on the cross because the authorities at the time did not like what he was saying or doing. So they had him killed.

And yet we say that saved us. That death saved us from our sins.

What do we mean when we say that?

Let's see what it says in Mark 8. Jesus speaking to his disciples. " THE SON OF MAN HAS COME NOT TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE IN RANSOM FOR THE MANY". There's the line "the son of man has come to give his life as a ransom for the many".

Somehow, the cross of Jesus pays a price. But Christians and theologians have wrestled with this idea up and down the centuries and they've come up with a number of different theories to try and answer questions like, who precisely gets the ransom money? How are we held to ransom? Who has us and how does Jesus' death involve a payment?

You look in the early church fathers. They come up with a theory that's been called the **Christus Victor** theory. Christ, the victor. Here's how it works: in our sin, we have, as it were, sold ourselves to the devil. When Jesus comes along, the devil is so interested in having him that he says, "I will exchange everything for him. I'll give up all these people that I've held for ransom if I can just have him." And so, he cuts a kind of deal with God and God says, "OK, you can have Jesus". So, the devil takes control of the situation. He presides over the passion, presides over the death, and he takes Jesus. But then, of course, in the Resurrection, the divinity of Jesus is revealed and now the devil is conquered by that greater power. It's as though God, the Father, used the humanity of Jesus as bait and the divinity of Jesus is a hook, and the devil is reeled in by God, the Father. Christ the Victor - he's paid a price, so to speak. He's ransomed us from the devil.

A few centuries after that, Saint Anselm of Canterbury proposes another theory. He says the ransom is paid to God, the Father, not to the devil. Our sin has offended God – look at the fall of Adam and Eve as an example of that. God is infinite, therefore, his offence at sin is infinite. **Who of us could ever pay a price that would satisfy the anger of God?** No one. Therefore, God, the Father, sends his son into human flesh so that in one sense, a human being is paying the price. But in the deepest sense, it's God himself paying the price. Now, an infinite payment can be made for the infinite offence given by sin. Therefore, in the death of Christ on the cross, a price is paid. A ransom is settled, and God, the Father's anger is satisfied. **Does this sound familiar to you?**

The re-establishment of justice through the cross, I think, is a basically right idea. But at the same time, a theory that troubles us a bit. It makes God, the Father, sound a bit like the ultimate dysfunctional parent, doesn't it? He's fallen into this infinite anger over sin and now demands the bloody sacrifice of his son before his anger is satisfied. Well, for a lot of people, this sounds not a lot like the loving father proclaimed by Jesus Christ. It's consistent with the image of God on a cloud judging us but not consistent with the image of God as one who loves us unconditionally.

So, what do we do? We have this language of ransom from Jesus himself. We have these two theories and other ones, too.

The Church's teaching has changed on this as we've come to understand context better. If we understand the context in which Mark wrote that Gospel and those words of Jesus it gives us a different perspective.

So what did the word “ransom” mean to them?

In Jesus' time, people were exposed to the elements to the dangers of the terrain, to wild animals, and they were exposed constantly to the danger of kidnapping. It was commonplace for travellers to be kidnapped, taken to a distant place, *held for ransom*. Now imagine how long it would take for that ransom note to get wherever it was going. Think of the amount of time it would take to pay the ransom if the people back home were able to pay it. It was a pretty dire, hopeless situation.

So, for the first Christians, somehow being in sin felt like that it felt like being held for ransom in a kind of hopeless situation, captive, imprisoned.

Have you ever felt that way? When you find that you can't break free of a repeated behaviour or feeling you have toward someone that I know is harmful to me or others?

I've heard sin as being described as a kind of violence born of fear. It makes sense. Sin that goes unchecked is harmful. It can hurt us and others around us.

Here's an example I've used with my kids in the past. Think of being jealous of someone. You can look enviously at someone thinking I wish I had. Now you could leave it there wishing well of the other. Or you could think I wish I had and because I don't you shouldn't either and so you grab the toy from someone else. That is violence born of fear in action.

Sin that goes unchecked can take a real hold over us. There is something about being in sin, which is like being in a prison. You see it all the time, the imprisonment of all kinds of people locked in fear and sin. It's like I'm a captive. It's like I'm a prisoner.

What the first Christians sense in the cross of Jesus Christ? They sensed liberation. It was like being ransomed.

Maybe the primary question is not who gets the ransom, the devil or God? Maybe it's primarily a question of feeling liberated.

WHAT DOES THE CROSS MEAN TO US?

WHAT DOES THE CROSS MEAN TO US?

GOD IS WITH US

He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and that's how we know it, the same as alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us, a comfort and a presence.

Through Jesus' passion and death he shows us that he is with us in our suffering because he also suffered.

Every time we are in pain or not happy we can look at the cross, we can remember that Jesus has been through it too.

And we can also remember that Jesus Christ defeated death.

PAGE 27A

How did the cross of Jesus liberate them from this fear?

Here are two ways that we ask you to reflect on with your child. You can find these on **page 27 of the handout**.

God is with us

The first is that Jesus' passion and death show us that **he is with us in our suffering** because he also suffered. On the cross, Jesus said “**MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?**” (MATTHEW 27:46). He lived and died in solidarity with us. That is something that no other religion offers and such a comfort. It also gifts us with being able to identify with other people's suffering and be a comfort to them.

We ask you to reflect on this with your child and maybe say a prayer if you, your child or anyone you know or don't know are suffering.

God forgave

GOD FORGAVE

“Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’” (LUKE 23:34)

On the cross Jesus didn't get angry or want revenge; instead he forgave. Jesus stopped the cycle of hate. Jesus asks us to “take up our cross and follow him”. This means to forgive as he forgives.

Is there someone in your life that you need to forgive? It might be a brother or sister or a friend who has done something to upset you. Together, why not say a prayer to God to give you the strength to forgive them like Jesus.



When we look at the cross, we can remember God's forgiveness.

“WHEN HE WAS ABUSED, HE DID NOT RETURN ABUSE; WHEN HE SUFFERED, HE DID NOT THREATEN; BUT HE ENTRUSTED HIMSELF TO THE ONE WHO JUDGES JUSTLY.” (1 PETER 2:23)

When someone hurts us, it is natural for us to look at that person and try and determine for ourselves what justice they should face and even the time scale. Holding a grudge is allowing the other person to live rent-free in your head. I used to hold on to unforgiveness thinking that somehow I was doing the other person harm. It is like drinking the poison that you want to give to someone else.

How many times have you broken up a fight/argument between your children and insisted that they forgive each other and "just let it go for goodness' sake!". Think about a time when you too have forgiven someone for something. **Forgiveness is setting somebody free and finding out that it's you that has been set free.**

“FORGIVE THEM FOR THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT THEY ARE DOING” (LUKE 23:24)

At the core of Jesus' consciousness and awareness, even on the cross, is forgiveness.

SIN

The last half of the handout looks at sin in more details. It looks at what it is and what it isn't and the effect that sin can have on our lives. We really recommend spending time reading through the handout yourself before you take your child through it. Please do use the references to the YouCat as well because they are great and will really help to reinforce your conversations.

The most important thing to share with your child is that we all fall short. God loves everyone the same. When we sin what it means is turning away or making choices that lead us away from the path of love. We all know that we can love each other better and ourselves too. But God is not the one who turns away. It is us that does. And if that goes unchecked it can feel like there has been a wall built up between us and God and we can feel a bit stuck. But God is not the one built the wall. It is us. God is always waiting at the door for us; waiting for us to turn back and open the door.