

*Good Friday, 2021*

Shortly we'll be invited to come forward to the cross. As we recall and recognise today, Christ suffered on the cross for us. We might recall that nails were driven through his hands and feet. What might the nails represent? Here are some suggestions.

There is the nail of betrayal. (Matthew 26:47-56) "While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him." A short time later, the other disciples desert Jesus and flee. So as we come forward we could consider how we betray others, how we abandon them in their time of need, how we think of ourselves first, and pray that we don't deceive ourselves. Our acts of betrayal hurt us and create walls between us and others, and wound God.

There is the nail of envy. When the mother of James and John comes to Jesus and asks that they be granted special favour in the kingdom, the other disciples were angry with the brothers. Matthew records (Matthew 20-28) "But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." So as we come forward we could consider how we envy others, how we desire more than we receive and seek to influence and rule over others and pray that we do not deceive ourselves. Our envy hurts us and creates walls between us and others and wounds God.

There is the nail of indecision. Matthew records (Matthew 27: 20-24) "Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said "Let him be crucified!" Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!" So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." So as we come forward we could consider how we waver, how we seek to avoid responsibility and to blame others for our actions, and pray that we do not deceive ourselves. Our indecision hurts us and creates walls between us and others, and wounds God.

There is the nail of cruelty. Matthew records (Matthew 27: 27-31) "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him". So as we come forward we could consider how we are cruel to others, how we malign and slander others and add to the evil that comes upon them, and pray that we do not deceive ourselves. Our cruelty hurts us and creates walls between us and others, and wounds God.

There is the nail of hatred. Luke records Jesus saying (Luke 6:22) "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return." As we come forward we could consider how we show hate to others, how we fail to care for others and make distinctions among them, and pray that we do not deceive ourselves. Our hatred hurts us and creates walls between us and others, and wounds God.

But as we come forward we could also consider that nails are not only symbols of pride, betrayal, envy, indecision, cruelty, hatred. Nails bind things together, we need nails to build things, for good or evil. How many nails are there in this building, or how many nails are there in the former Church we now use as a hall. I wonder if nails were used to join the arms of the cross on which Jesus died. As evil as the cross is, John in his gospel leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is glorified on the cross. John's gospel is described as the book of signs (other gospel writers call them miracles) and the book of glory. And from the very first chapters of the gospel John starts hinting at the moment of Jesus glorification. Later he records Jesus as saying that when he is high and lifted up he will draw all people to himself.

Christ proclaims that through God's saving work we are reconciled to God, forgiven and empowered or freed to live with the New Creation in the very midst of the world. It is in the cross of Christ where two worlds intersect; the old barbarity of sinfulness, evil and death in all its forms from the individual to the global and the new humanity revealed in Christ, characterised by life in all its fullness, light, love, hope and justice. And it is here, right in the centre of the cross, held together by nails that Christians are called and freed for the service of others.

*Crucifixion: Jesus is nailed to the cross  
See, as they strip the robe from off his back  
And spread his arms and nail them to the cross,  
The dark nails pierce him and the sky turns black,  
And love is firmly fastened on to loss.  
But here a pure change happens. On this tree  
Loss becomes gain, death opens into birth.  
Here wounding heals and fastening makes free,  
Earth breathes in heaven, heaven roots in earth.  
And here we see the length, the breadth, the height,  
Where love and hatred meet and love stays true,  
Where sin meets grace and darkness turns to light,  
We see what love can bear and be and do.  
And here our Saviour calls us to his side,  
His love is free, his arms are open wide.*

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