

The Second Sunday of Lent (Second Service)

Numbers 21:4-9

Luke 14:7-33

May the words of my lips the meditations of all of our hearts be now and always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

William of St Thierry, 12th century Cistercian monk, said this:
'My turning, my conversion, is to the Crucified.
His cross is my glory; with it my brow is signed,
in it my mind rejoices, by it my life is directed,
and my death is made dear.'

One of the deep characteristics of the Christian is that their life, *our* life, is one great turning towards the Crucified; our life is directed towards the Cross. Repentance of course, with which we began this, and every, Sunday service of Evensong, means turning around, literally, and the choir modelled it for us just a few moments ago when, at the point where we professed our faith in the Apostles' Creed, the traditional formulation of faith that all baptised Christians make at the point of their rebirth, they physically turned and faced the altar, behind which of course is our extraordinary crucifixion reredos. And those of you who have strolled past the church in the dark will have noticed that normally that carving is illuminated, so that even if you can't see anything else in the building when we are closed at night, the one thing that is lit up is the crucifix. Our turning, our conversion, is to the crucified.

And why? Well of course because it is only in the Cross that we find our healing. Our first lesson this evening was the story of snakes in the desert, and the fashioning by Moses, at the Lord's command, of the bronze serpent. And the tradition has always

seen that serpent set up on a pole as a type, a foreshadowing, of the crucifixion of Christ. When we gaze upon the Cross we are healed. The gospel reading at Holy Communion today was the passage that the choir just sung to John Stainer's famous setting, and just before the verses that we've heard in our anthem Jesus says, "just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man will be lifted up... For God so loved the world."

Our journey through Lent is a journey towards the Cross. Because it is at the Cross that we find our healing. And that, of course, is because it is on the Cross, on the hill far away, without a city wall, that Christ carries all of our brokenness, all of our insufficiency, all of our ignorance, our weakness, and our own deliberate faults, and descends into hell with them, and in that action he evacuates death of its power, and then rises, dragging us up, into the light.

At the point when I was leaving the Cathedral and trying to find gainful employment elsewhere I came second for a job with one of the Christian healing charities. The reason they didn't give me the job is that they had asked all of the candidates to give a presentation on Christian healing, and I talked about death. I said that death was the ultimate act of Christian healing, because it is what Jesus did. And it is through going where Jesus goes that we rise to where Jesus rises. They didn't like that, and they gave the job to someone else.

But I still think it's true. The Lenten journey, and the whole orientation of the Christian, is towards the Cross. The serpent on the pole upon which we can gaze and be made whole. And in the light of which we can take up our own crosses, and follow him towards our ultimate healing, towards the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.