

After we've shared a closing prayer, when you are ready to leave, please feel able to come and stand, or kneel at the foot of the cross. Take up one of these strips of bandage and take it from this place out into whatever this Passiointide weekend holds for you. Keep this token with you, in a pocket or a bag, and know each time you touch it, or see it, that Christ is with you.

If you would like someone to pray for something specific with you, you are then welcome to move through to the Chapel.

Shall we stand.... and say together:

**Loving God  
your Son Jesus Christ carried us to the cross, shed his blood for us and brought us into a new community with you:**

**help us to follow in his way,  
deny ourselves and take up the cross he give us,  
that the world may learn his way of peace;**

**may his life and his purposes be alive in us this day,  
and may we be alive in him;**

**and when our hearts are broken,  
and when the burdens of this life feel too great to bear,  
take us to the cross,  
and enable us to see there  
the great weight that Jesus carried;  
for here we receive the affirmation of your love,  
the assurance of your promise,  
and the strength to persevere.**

**For we ask it in his name. Amen. ++Stephen**

The congregation may leave.



## **Good Friday – an hour at the Cross St. Michael's Church, Highworth**

3rd of April 2026 from 2pm - 3pm



### **Introduction:**

**“In order to understand the cross you need to stand under it... with the imagination as well as the mind. With the heart as well as the head.”  
++Stephen**

So writes Bishop Stephen Cottrell, the Archbishop of York in his book of meditations on the cross: '[The Things He Carried](#)'. It is this book, as well as liturgy from the Anglican and Northumbrian traditions, as well as periods of silence, that will contribute to this service. at the end of the service you will be invited to come and collect something from the foot of the cross, either stay in prayer for a while or depart about your business please leave in silence respecting those who remain in prayer.

This is the hour at which Christ died. Our place at the foot of his cross is to receive afresh the love that placed him there, and to understand in some small way some the different dimensions to the suffering that he endured. As he is laid to rest in the tomb, we too will be asked to allow Jesus to be laid to rest in our hearts, as we await his resurrection.

As we start our act of worship and remembrance, let us pray together

**Eternal God,  
in the cross of Jesus  
we see the cost of our sin  
and the depth of your love:  
in humble hope and fear  
may we place at his feet  
all that we have and all that we are,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

We start by remembering what it was that Christ endured after his betrayal by Judas, his desertion by the disciples whom he loved. Jesus now stands alone:

**Reading: John 19:1-16**

[Short Silence]

**“They made him a kind of pantomime king. Something to laugh at. Something to scorn. They bowed before him and grinning they worshipped him. Then they beat him.**

**They had their way with him. They made fun of him in the way that bullies easily do when there is someone defenceless in their minds. Someone who won't fight back. Someone who's a bit different. Someone who makes claims that are easy to mock. His silence convicts him.” ++Stephen**

[Short Silence]

What caused Jesus the most pain? Was it the crown of thorns [weigh it in my hands], the beating, the taunting of soldiers, the confusion of Pilate,... or the silence of those whom he had loved and nurtured to a point where they could witness to who he was “The Christ. The son of the living God” (Matt 16:16)

In a moment you will brought a basket. In is a pile of thorns (I used dead Gorse). Please take a piece and as you hold it in your hands during a few minutes of silence, consider what it is that we hold that pierces Jesus skin, and causes him to suffer.

### **Question 1    What do you do that causes Jesus to suffer?**

- **Bowls of thorns are distributed...**

[3-4 minutes of silence is held]

**Song: [Jesus, remember me](#) (remaining seated) (Taizé)**

*Here at St Michael's, we are well used to the empty cross, the finely planed and polished image that sanitises the truth about crucifixion. It somehow doesn't seem fit for today's purpose. [Take down the cross behind the altar]*

**We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,  
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

To him who loves us  
and has freed us from our sins by his blood,  
and made us a kingdom of priests  
to stand and serve before our God;  
**to him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honour, glory and might,  
for ever and ever. Amen.**

**Song: [Bless the Lord, my soul](#) (remaining standing) (Taizé)**

### **Intercessions:**

Most merciful God,  
who by the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ  
delivered and saved the world:  
grant that by faith in him who suffered on the cross  
we may triumph in the power of his victory;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
**Amen.**

[Short Silence]

There was one final task, and to complete it men stepped out from hiding.

### **Reading: John 19:38-42**

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were the first to “expand the the dimensions of their heart” and show their love for Christ in simple, tender action. Wrapped in strips of cloth that no doubt soaked up the last of the blood from his wounds, Jesus is laid to rest.

And so, as we now look to leave this place, so Jesus can be laid to rest in us, as we hold him in hearts and wait and watch for him to rise to life and live again through us.

Now is our chance to reach towards that seamless robe, as we rest with hands open, reaching towards the cross, let us in after a short time of silence seek that forgiveness and healing.

[Short Silence]

We know that this is what we do:

**We pass the buck,  
we blame each other,  
we evade responsibility,  
we duck and weave,  
we squirm and sneer.**

And Jesus carries it all;  
**he carries it for love.**

When we say he carried the sins of the world:

**we mean every sin,  
we mean that there is no such thing  
as a large sin or a small sin,  
we mean every sin that separates us from each other,  
we mean every sin that separates us from God,  
we mean that sin is real,  
and we are talking about *my* sin.**

Jesus is carrying something else that is very precious,  
something that needs to be restored;  
something which he knows can be beautiful,  
something which can be loved back to life.

**He carries me.  
And I am not heavy to him.**

[Short silence]

Please stand

You are worthy, O Lamb, for you were slain,  
and by your blood you ransomed for God  
saints from every tribe and language and nation;  
you have made them to be a kingdom and priests  
serving our God.

As a different cross is brought forward and placed near the altar, so we're going to listen to another reading from Stephen Cottrell's book:

- **The large wooden cross is brought in and propped up**
- **The crown of thorns is placed over the upright to rest on the cross piece**
- **BOTH whilst the following is read**

**“The Romans were fond of crucifixion. It was their execution of choice. They liked its precision. It produced the maximum amount of pain and a death struggle of adjustable duration. They had so mastered this technology of killing that they could decide how much it hurt and how long it lasted. The clever bit was the nail through the feet. A body just suspended by the wrists will soon develop agonizing cramp. The ribs are drawn upwards and the chest is fixed in position as if the victim has just drawn a long breath, but cannot breathe out. The metabolic rate surges and within an hour or so the victim dies of suffocation. But by nailing the feet the condemned man could buy time by pushing himself up on the nails and by stretching his legs could raise his body a few inches and relieve the tension in his chest and arms.**

**But perching with the full weight of your body on a square nail driven through the middle bones of your feet brings intolerable pain. The victim soon lets his knees sag and is once more hanging from the wrists, and so the cycle repeats itself, over and over again, sometimes for as long as three days. Death comes slowly.” ++Stephen**

[Short Silence]

*As humans we have a tendency to feel we're worth something. However “Crucifixion says that human individuals, simply as such are worth nothing.” Thousands upon thousands of nameless individuals were crucified by the Romans, a “corruptly repressive” regime. And yet we remember this one man. (from Andrew Shanks 'Honesty' in [“Praying for England”](#))*

**Reading: John 19:16b-22**

***The image of Christ's head from the Graham Sutherland tapestry at Coventry Cathedral is displayed on the screen***

Look into the eyes of Jesus.

God had spent every moment of creation and since, loving the world into which he had breathed life, and had sought to live within each individual whom he had formed in his own image, and the nation he had made his

own. And yet despite prophets and kings, covenants and promises, psalms and proverbs,... still he was rejected and ignored.

Now God sought to communicate with all people through the only language they would understand: the language of human life,... and death. The ultimate love, and the ultimate sacrifice of himself. It was a new covenant, a new promise, the beginning of God's ultimate purpose for us – that we might fully know him, and be known by him. Look into the eyes of Jesus... Look at the cross on which he died.

[Short Silence]

Like his friends, we might sometimes deny Jesus, run away and hide when we see how much knowing him might cost us, but ultimately we believe he died so that we could respond to God's incredible love.

We have made that response of faith by placing ourselves here in the presence of the cross. We, are the Body of Christ - those left so that his work on earth might be completed. We know Jesus and are known by him, so now we have to shoulder his cross. We have to live out his promise to the world.

As we sit in a few more minutes of silence, let us consider this:

**Question 2    What does it mean to help Jesus carry the cross?  
(words with face of Christ on the screen)**

[3-4 minutes of silence is held]

Let us pray:

Lord, you willingly shouldered your cross.

**Yet we are weak,  
and we shrink from the weight of your suffering.**

In our weakness Lord, we pray:

Your will be done.

**Your will be done.**

Jesus, you were first a carpenter:

**build us into what you desire;**

secure every joint tightly,  
**that we may hold together.**

Plane the rough surfaces of our relationships,  
**so that we might be your workmanship.**

In our weakness Lord, we pray:

Your will be done.

**Your will be done.**

[Short silence]

**Reading: John 19:23-24 and 28-30**

**“Jesus wore a seamless robe. Like everything else it would be taken from him... The soldiers gave it a dignity that they did not give to him, for he was a thing despised, and a thing rejected.” +  
+Stephen**

There was “a seamless purpose” to all this. [Lay a sheet over the cross beam of the cross.] God's purpose. From the moment of his conception and birth, not only Jesus but all those who had been part of his life and ministry had been fulfilling vital roles in God's purpose. It might be hard to stomach, but even those who beat and mocked Jesus, who now drew lots for the only thing which they viewed as having a value, were part of that purpose.

“Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” That was their purpose; they were not only part of the industry of Roman death, they were there to be given life. The life that comes with forgiveness. It was the sort of forgiveness that brings healing, not just for actions of those who are under orders, but for physical illness and disability. After all we know that self-same robe had been touched among a jostling crowd, and how the woman who had done so discovered the imperative that Jesus has for knowing who it is that is reaching out to him.

This was what was now completed. The means of forgiveness for the whole world, the “seamless purpose of God.” For now, “nailed down and lifted up, shining a light through the darkness” was the total generosity of God, the means of forgiveness symbolised in a moment of exquisite torture. And it is there for us to reach towards, whatever our past or our present.