

Sunday 13th September 2026; Patronal Benefice Holy Communion, Gilling – Holy Cross

“For God so loved the world...” For many these six words sum up everything in their lives, in hopes and dreams, everything in the world. These are core words, if not the core words of our faith, that motivate us and bring assurance and hope in life. They bring an answer to questions like, ‘What are you living for? And what is keeping you from living fully for that?’

These are fitting questions for every day of our lives. Our answers reveal what we truly believe, the convictions that draw us nearer to God, and the fears or habits keep that us from living freely and faithfully?

These core beliefs are the convictions beneath our everyday choices. Often formed early and carried almost unconsciously, they shape how we understand ourselves, treat other people, make decisions, and respond to God. Some help us to live with courage and compassion; others trap us in fear, shame, or resentment. Today we remember the Holy Cross which invites us to bring those hidden beliefs into God’s light summarised in those six words I began with. “For God so loved the world.” Those words give us three fundamental convictions to live by: God is real, God is loving, and the world is precious to God.

First, the core belief that there is a God. Not everyone in this world believes in God. John 3:17 teaches us that God did not send the Son into the world to condemn or judge the world, but just the recognition that believing there is a God is a core belief that shapes how we live our lives. When we believe in God, we believe that there is more to this life than the day-to-day of our existence, that there is more to this life than we can see and there is a higher purpose to our lives, a deeper meaning. Our life can be changed and transformed by this belief. The Holy

Cross invites, and some would say, compels us, us to this belief.

Yet belief in God, by itself, is not the whole of Christian faith. The Pharisees and the people believed in God, passionately, and still they opposed Jesus and called for his death. History likewise warns us that religious conviction can be used to justify terrible harm and indeed still does today, not just wars fought in the name of religion, but in the criticism, the gossip, the mean-spiritedness we see all too close to us every day.

Faithfulness is not proved merely by saying that God exists; it is revealed in whether our lives are being transformed by the love of God. It is not just turning up to church on a Sunday; it is about changing direction and priorities in life, it is about praying, about seeking each day to go further and deeper into the love of God, and in so doing revealing that love to one another and the world. The Holy Cross is the means by which that transformation takes place.

The second conviction then is that we don't just believe in God; we believe that God loves the world, 'for God so loved'. We believe that God loves us. That should be a core belief, but it is amazing how many people know they are supposed to believe this but still question or doubt it when it is made clear on the Holy Cross. There we see the good news addressed to you: God loves you. God's love is not a reward for getting everything right, and it is not withdrawn when you fail. In Jesus on the cross, God has moved reaches out to you with grace. You cannot make God love you more, and your worst day cannot make God love you less. When this becomes a core belief rather than merely a familiar phrase, it frees you to live without fear and to become a bearer of that same love.

The third core belief is that God loves the world—not only the church, not only those who agree with us, and not only those we find easy to love. God’s love reaches towards the whole world. If this conviction takes root in us, it changes how we see our neighbours, strangers, enemies, and the wounded creation around us. We cannot claim to receive God’s love while refusing to let that love widen our hearts. The Holy Cross shows us the way, it is the widening of the heart of Jesus to encompass all creation.

The Holy Cross tells us that because we belong to God, the world does not have the final word about who we are. Jesus sends us into the very world God loves: to forgive where resentment has taken root, to notice those who are overlooked, to serve without seeking applause, and to love even when love is costly. So today on the Holy Cross Day, ask yourself again: What am I living for? What is keeping me from living fully for God? The Holy Cross gives us the truth beneath every answer: ‘For God so loved the world’ - God exists, God loves me and my neighbour, and this world. May that love that is given to us on the Holy Cross flow through our choices, our words and actions, and everything in our lives, today and every day.

Thanks be to God. Amen.