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## Why the Cross?

### An article from the *Cathedral Times*

Why the cross?

According to Episcopal custom, most churches will transfer the Feast of the Holy Cross this year—from September 14, its normal date, to the Monday following, September 15. The Feast of the Holy Cross is not normally observed on a typical Sunday, and the assigned Sunday propers usually take precedence.

However, on this Sunday, September 14, the Cathedral of St. Philip will take notice of Holy Cross Day, and we will do so with sage deliberation and steady care. In fact, during this program year (2014-2015) at the Cathedral, we plan to take advantage of some of the lesser known feasts of the church and highlight their themes on the Sundays closest to them. These themes will not always replace our Sunday lessons, but the themes themselves will be emphasized. In particular our Evensong music and meditations will often use these adjacent feast days.

So, this Sunday: Holy Cross. I will focus on Holy Cross both in my Sunday sermons and in my opening Dean's Forum class. However, I will do so with careful deliberation, because I realize that the cross, even the "holy" cross has been used in quite detrimental ways throughout Christian history. James Carroll's mighty book, *Constantine's Sword*, was a scathing critique of the manner in which the cross has especially been used in anti-semitic ways. That is one of the attitudes towards the cross that I seek to redeem.

Furthermore, the cross was surely understood originally as a violent symbol. In its day, it was as violent and as shameful a form of death as would be hanging or lynching years later. But the wonder of the cross is that its violent power was overturned, even transformed. One of our old prayers states that God "made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life and peace."

However, exactly HOW this transformation occurred is debated and contemplated daily in the Christian world. We know we are saved in Christ, but just exactly how did that salvation occur? Many people, myself included, refuse to believe that the cross should be understood according to the same violent principles of the first century AD. The cross does not mean that something violent and bloody needs to occur in our lives in order for salvation to be realized.

Instead, the shape of the cross is the mighty symbol of paradox. Many people have understand the horizontal axis of the cross to mean reconciliation with each other, and the vertical axis of the cross to mean reconciliation of humanity with God, with the transcendent. But its very shape, an intersection of two lines, can be seen as paradox, as the meeting of two different worlds. Perhaps the cross means the paradox of reconciliation.

Surely, the cross finally means forgiveness. Join us this Sunday, throughout the day, for further meditation on the holy cross of Jesus. "Why the Cross?" will be the subject of the Dean's Forum at 10:10 am, too.



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