

Salvation and Easter in the Christian Tradition

Christian belief and thinking: some key Bible bits

Within the Christian tradition the overarching story is of a God who creates a humanity that sins and rebels but that is still loved by God (Romans 5:6-8)

The Easter story is a focal point for this theme, including Palm Sunday (Mark 11:1-10), Good Friday (Mark 15:25-39) and Easter Sunday (Mark 16:1-8).

The parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4-7) is one of the images the Christian tradition draws upon to depict an image of a God who looks for and seeks to save humanity from the sin that has taken it astray.

Salvation and Easter: Thinking Theologically

This section is designed to enable staff reflection on the concept of salvation.

Easter is both the marking of a historical event and a time of great symbolism for the church. The last supper is a meal, but it is also a symbolic act, the cross is a wooden object that means so much more. What events can you think of that have been symbolic of something much bigger, either life events or historical ones?

Salvation is about something being saved. What do we think of when we use the word 'save'?

As a school could you – staff team, and young people, spend some time thinking about the uses of that word?

Easter marks and symbolises God saving people. Christian teaching includes the concept of the "Fall" – building on the story of Adam and Eve. Christianity teaches that we haven't lived and managed the world as well as we could have and that missing of the mark creates a gap between us and the God who created us. The cross can act as a symbol of the pain and suffering endured in this world. Easter offers a time to recognise this and give it a place in our reflection.

The story of Easter is of Good Friday followed by Easter Sunday and the Resurrection. Whatever beliefs people may have about this event, it presents the Christian hope that goodness is stronger than evil - that God always has the last word and it is one of hope. Having endured persecution in a concentration camp in World War 2, Corrie Ten-Boom reflected on the pain of that experience with the words "No pit is so deep that he is not deeper still." It's a challenging notion and worth a bit of reflection – the heart of the Christian faith. However it may seem following the stuff of life or the morning news, the hope offered is that God's love is the last word.

Life experience can take us through friendships and relationships that come awry or fall apart, though in some cases these can be saved by being repaired or restored. Sometimes this can be a tough or painful process in itself. Christian teaching is that, in some way, Easter was about the way in which God brought us back to God. The old

term for this – atonement – was coined to name this very idea. It is what its parts say: at-one-ment, being united as one.

One way of reflecting on this is through contemplating the way relationships can be saved, repaired and restored.

Through the school

Whole school:

Some events have much more significance than others. In the run up to Easter children and the whole school could give some thought to the events that have mattered most in our lives and that of our school. It has the makings of a ‘Top 3’ list, underpinned by the simple recognition that one historical event hugely inspires Christian belief and hope.

Lent, the forty days leading up to Easter starts with Ash Wednesday. It is preceded by Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day) when people would have a last feast using up luxury items such as butter and eggs, before the more austere period of Lent.

The tradition of giving things up for Lent is one children engage with – either for the whole 40 or for certain days. As a simple prompt to the memory, that is devotion enough.

This season comes from the memory of the story of Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness at the start of his ministry (Matthew 4:1-11), a story captured in the beautiful short animation, “40” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-6a25Yo2wE>

Could you hide 40 card signs around the building bearing the number “40”? Would children figure out where they all are? Tac them up in plain sight (maybe out of reach) as a reminder of Lent’s 40 days to Easter.

As we contemplate the Last Supper, where Jesus shared a meal as a way of asking us to remember him we can think about the sharing of food across the school. What are the different times when we do this? Easter may be a good time to think about lunch times and the significance of sharing in the Christian faith, founded on this sense of community and sharing.

Worship.

The Palm Cross is a symbol both of the Palm Sunday entry to Jerusalem and the Cross of Christ. Some churches provide Palm Crosses as a way of remembering the story of Jesus coming to Jerusalem. Could you provide these for children in the last week of term? Here’s a link <https://www.eden.co.uk/palm-crosses-200-pack/>

The cross is a focus for this festival and it’s a tough one. On one level it is a symbol of torture and death and the Good Friday is a tough one. Worship can include relating the story and explaining that Jesus did this for people. The idea of how Christians believe this could be ‘for us’ may not be delved into with younger children, but they can be made aware that Jesus taught people to love one another, including those some thought you shouldn’t love – such as the Romans’ tax collectors – and that he was put to death because of this.

Salvation is seen as a rescue to God, sometimes described as a new life. Worship can reflect this theme of new life over the Springtime. Bulbs on the worship table, looking out for signs of spring are the sort of examples that can be drawn into this time. And, of course, eggs!

In class

The Easter story has a memorable and transforming ending. Reflection on this could lead to a discussion of other stories and how they are transformed by their ending. Whether it be the fruit appearing in 'Handa's Surprise' or the finding of the owner of the glass slipper, children can reflect on the stories they know, the track they were taking and how the ending either topped or changed events up to that point.

Salvation is about rescue. It is the story of God rescuing people and getting them back. Children may be encouraged to think of other rescue stories they know – other tales in which someone is rescued by others from the situation into which they have fallen. The final moments of 'Toy Story' are a great example, though children will have more contemporary examples.

Church links

Easter is a time when schools should try and visit their parish church for an act of worship centred on the festival. Holiday dates can sometimes set a gap between the last day of term and Maundy Thursday. It is recommended that the full cycle of cross and resurrection be explored before children go on Easter break.

Crosses in church provide a valuable source of exploration. Just taking children into the building and asking them to count the number of crosses can bring home the importance of the symbol – bearing in mind many miss out the very shape of the building, which may be a cruciform shape. Look out as well for other depictions of the events of Easter and the chalice and platen – the plate and cup used for bread and wine.

Some schools make arrangements for the making of ashes and the ceremony of ashing, where a cross of ash is placed on the forehead as a symbol of the pain and sorrow of Lent and the things that have separated God's creation from God. Traditionally old Palm Crosses are burned and mixed with oil to make ashes.

Staff reflection

Easter speaks of a God who reached out to save a relationship and is a time when we can reflect on the friendships and connections we have. We can give thanks for the constant ones, thanks for any that have been broken but restored, and possibly reflect on whether there are any we should attend to and either nurture or repair. If you are minded to take this to a spiritual reflection the very act of quietly listing the names of people is, in itself, a form of prayer.

Whether the cross provides a symbol of love at a cost, a symbol of the pain of the world or a way of reflecting on God's love for us, the invitation is there to respond to it with our own thoughts.

“While it is essential to see the passion of Jesus as something that freely works, independently of our effort, to renew and heal us, that very healing and renewal come to their fullness only as we absorb in heart and mind what it is in us that calls out for healing”

Rowan Williams

For the blessing of crosses in classrooms

Lord, bless this cross/ these crosses which is/are placed in our school and lead us through the inspiration of Christ's cross to love others as he loved all,
Amen

Resources

'Creative Ideas for Lent & Easter' by Jane Tibbs (BRF)

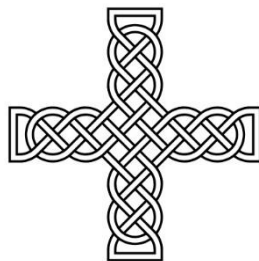
'Messy Easter' by Jane Leadbetter (BRF)

Some schools keep a box of crosses of different sorts from various traditions and situations. Children can look at them, draw them, find out more about them and say which one means something to them.

Here's a list with order links. Links are to Amazon.

(I can't vouch for quality or reputability of traders.)

- [A plain cross](#) is what it says it is.
- A [crucifix](#) has the figure of Christ on the cross.
- A [holding cross](#) is moulded to hands and sometimes associated with being held in times of challenge or ill health.
- [Palm Crosses](#) are often handed out on Palm Sunday and made of palm leaves
- An [Orthodox Cross Crucifix](#) has items built into it: soil, stones, rose incense and an olive leaf
- [Latin American Painted Crosses](#) have imagery painted onto them
- A [Celtic Cross](#) has knot work carved into it
- A [Christ Story Cross](#) contains elements of the Jesus story within it



Salvation: Thinking theologically

What happened: even the most sceptical of historians agree Jesus was crucified and that, somehow, his followers were still inspired to carry on his movement. The historical events of Easter tell something in themselves of the mission of Christ. Crucifixion was a punishment reserved for a particular type of criminal: the rebel, the slave fighting for liberation, anyone who rose against Rome. As one of the cruellest deaths devised it was seen as a very graphic and public means of discouraging dissent. In the Cross we see Christ challenged an Empire and the way things were run in that time, not with an army, but with his taught and lived message of love. He taught that everyone was a loved by God and accepted those others would have shunned. In doing so he undermined attempts to divide people into the accepted and the unclean. That's why they killed him.

The place of the cross as a central symbol of the Christian faith stems from this.

It's a bit like a rescue: The Christian faith is built around a narrative in which God creates people and they fall away from god's way of living, an outcome we term 'sin'. The story of salvation is one of God rescuing people. This is seen in the life, work, death and resurrection of Christ. In this action God was reaching out and bringing people back to God. In restoring that relationship between God and people, this atonement' (literally 'at-one-ment') is secured.

"What human beings are saved from is anything that militates against this life, this goodness, truth and beauty; anything that hinders its growth, anything that pulls people away from it, anything that makes it seem impossible; the breakdown of relationships between people, between people and their environment, between people and God" (Higton, 'Christian Doctrine', p.262)

Images of Salvation: the work of salvation is one of rescue. Christian faith teaches that we have become distanced from God, like a lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7) or estranged child (Luke 15:11-32). The cross is both the symbol and means of making us one with God once again. There have been different explanations used for this down the ages – that we are somehow 'bought back' or that a sentence is commuted. The images tend to take on features from the dominant culture of their day – so in the last century there was more talk of it being a bit like a victory. It's worth allowing any such images to inspire where they inspire but to bear in mind they are just human ways of capturing an amazing divine act of grace.

"For us..." Easter and the cross are central to our understanding of salvation, with the notion that Christ's death was an act undertaken for others. This has been described as a symbolic act, the culmination of a love that teaches us how to live and sets an example of how to live in a way that will save humanity. It is also seen as having some effect in itself – that like a stone being dipped in clear water, Good Friday shows us God taking on the sin of humanity, such that when the stone is clean, the water will carry the dirt away. This carrying away of sin is seen as somehow symbolised and done by Christ on the cross.

One key message in all this is that of the cross showing us that God sides with people. God is for us. God's love accepts us all.

Cross and Resurrection Salvation is sometimes depicted as an individual activity but the Christian faith sees it as an expression of what God is doing through the whole of

creation. The notion that goodness defeats evil is both the story of Easter and the Christian hope for the future of God's creation.
"The Crucifixion is not a defeat needing the Resurrection to reverse it, but a victory which the Resurrection quickly follows and seals" Michael Ramsey

What happened on Good Friday?

What must it be like to care for everyone?

Why are some people called 'good' and others 'bad'?

What happens when someone is rescued?

Why do we save something?

What's wrong?

What would be the worst thing about being God?

What's it like to lose something?

What's it like to find something?

What things do people do for us?

How does it feel to be helped?

Why do people do things for other people?

Is there more good than bad in the world?

Good or bad: which is winning?

How does bad become good?

