

Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev Alison Heal on Sunday 14th June 2026

Bible passages: Matthew 9 and Romans 5

Think about how we use the image of the cross. Look around the church and you'll see plenty: We have our wooden cross at the front. We're using the amazing image of this cross, which is on a Polish mountain, as our theme today. There's a crucifix there, a reminder that we're gratefully using the Catholic Archbishop's chapel. And if you look around, there may be other crosses, in the furnishings, around necks, maybe on other jewellery or on the books in church.

We haven't used the word cross yet, in our service. Our first reading talked about Jesus' death, but in that passage Paul didn't spell out that Jesus died on a cross. Of course we'll hear the cross named in our communion prayers, as we prepare to share bread and wine, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's interesting: we place the cross as the key symbol of our Christian faith, but maybe then we don't talk about it very much. I don't mean just in church, I mean in our lives too. We may say to friends or workmates: 'I go to church', 'I believe in God' or 'I'm a Christian', but I think talking about the cross would seem a bit much, wouldn't it? I may be wrong, maybe something you would talk about the cross. But the cross *is* offensive – it was the Roman's most barbaric and shameful instrument of torture. And the cross can still offend. Saint Paul said that preaching Christ, crucified, was: 'a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles'. Foolish nonsense, or a challenge to everything people thought they knew about God.

It may not be so different today. Take a cross out onto the streets of Luxembourg, and you might imagine it creates the same offence. Rev William Porter did that about a year and a half ago, and met up with Geoff and Barbara H. In fact, he found some more positive reactions. Ali Sahib, whom some of you know, interviewed him for Chronicle.lu, and reported that William told him: "*people maybe don't understand the cross, but they see it as a positive sign, of love, of healing.*" William talked about his hope that: "*as I walk, I meet people in each city and share something of hope, something of love, something of peace*". William Porter, is coming back to Luxembourg next Saturday to speak at the Let's Pray seminar and worship and prayer night. He's going to be speaking about prayer, and the power of the cross.

As William says, as Geoff often says, the cross, is about love. Now this is where our readings today come in. We heard Simon read Paul's words, that 'God proves his *love* for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.'

Then Becky read the Gospel, where we hear that Jesus, 'When he saw the crowds, had *compassion* for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.'

There are a few useful questions you can ask yourself whenever you hear a Bible reading.

The first is: What does this tell me about God?

The next: What does it tell me about myself?

Then: What might it say about my relationship to God and to other people?

Let's take the first two questions with relation to our readings:

God *proves his love* for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

When he saw the crowds, Jesus had *compassion* for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

What do these two readings say about God? He loves first, he has compassion, he doesn't wait for us to get ourselves sorted out. Jesus told the story of the loving father (painting behind the altar) to make that clear once and for all: we don't have to pull ourselves together and get ourselves right before God loves us. The loving father runs to us. Jesus Christ, **God the Son**, dies for us. In more everyday terms, Jesus looks at those crowds in the city, and he has *compassion* for them, because they're harried and helpless.

This leads on to what the readings tell us about ourselves. Harried and helpless. Does that sound like you, at least some days? How much of our rushing and our striving and our doing more and our trying to get everything right, stems from this misplaced desire to pull ourselves together and put ourselves right with God? How much of our rushing comes from a desire to be loved, to be worthy, loved by anybody, loved by God? Worthy of anyone, worthy of God?

This urgent rush to be worthy of love is misplaced, we learn from our readings today, because while we were weak, while we were unworthy, while we were not getting things right: that's when Jesus died on the cross for love of us.

Jesus didn't look at those crowds and think: pull yourselves together, then I'll come to you. He looked at the crowds, and had compassion. And that compassion led all the way to the cross.

I suppose we can look at our third question now: what do the readings tell us about our relationship to God and to other people?

Firstly, they tell us to come to the cross, to stand at the foot of the cross and pour out all that junk we wish we didn't carry around with us. Our weakness, our unworthiness, our inability to get things right. Jesus is ready to take them on our behalf – this is a key part of what he has done for us on the cross.

Second, it tells us that those harried, helpless, or even those bullying, unhelpful, people around us, are in exactly the same situation as us. As God offers us love, he offers it to them, too. As we have messed up, they have messed up. As we long for something better, they long too.

The Let's Pray Week of Prayer for Luxembourg is based on this recognition that God looks on all of us living in Luxembourg, and has compassion on us. God looks with love on your neighbour, your co-worker, your boss, your sports team member, your hairdresser, your garage mechanic, the police officers, the beggars, the government, the Grand Duke, the airport staff... God's compassion and love is the same for each one, the same for you and for me. And through his death on the cross and the power of his resurrection, he offers new life to all these people, to us, and to the country of Luxembourg.

Last week we had our formal Evensong and Te Deum where we prayed for the Grand Duke and for the country. This coming week, all the Christians of Luxembourg are invited into All Saints to continue those prayers, in a series of prayer stations based on the Lord's Prayer. If you can, please come into the chapel here some time over the next week. Come to pray for your family and your neighbours, or any of the other people we're thinking of, because not one of them is less than loved in God's eyes. Come and pray, uniting in love for God and neighbour with Christians from other churches. Come and pray before the cross, joining in with God's love for the people of our country.

I'm going to finish with a short prayer from yesterday's Lectio 365, which takes up this theme:

Holy Spirit, please bless All Saints Luxembourg with daring prayers that release new life into people and places all around us. May we believe and trust you for resurrection life in ourselves, and in our world.

Amen