

Introduction

Finding ways to connect with the worldwide family of the Christian Faith has been a growing area of interest both in churches and schools. Such windows into the multi-cultural and international practice of Christianity in today's world are a vital resource to give us a true picture of what it means to be a global Christian in the 21st century. For Christians, this is of course also important evidence of the continuing truth and power of the story of Jesus to influence lives and transform societies.

In [A-cross the World](#), published by Barnabas in 2005, this connection to the big picture was through the symbol of the cross. Differing Christian traditions and various Christian faith communities around the world are united by this one key and central sign of a shared faith. This universal cross has at the same time been interpreted, designed and adapted to express a unique, local expression of that same faith. With each cross comes a particular story of how each community experiences God's love and puts it into action.

Preparation

Each of the crosses in this new series supplements the 40 crosses that can already be found in the book [A-cross the World](#). With each, there is a Bible link with wondering questions, background information about the cross, stories to share and craft ideas to make a version of the cross - providing enough material for a session with children in a church group, in the classroom or at an all-age event. There is also a picture provided for each cross that could be printed or used in a PowerPoint presentation in order to provide a talking point for groups or as a focus for collective worship.

This cross belongs to a series of new crosses and, as with the first collection, the overall aim remains the same, namely:

- to enable children and adults to see the cross through the eyes of other cultures and traditions;
- to prompt discussion and debate on why this single, historical event continues to exercise such an influence worldwide;
- to explore how Christians in a wide variety of places, different times in history and in different circumstances, have lived purposeful lives because of their faith in a Christ, who died and who is risen - symbolised by the cross.

Development

To view an associated picture for this cross, go to [An Ash Cross - picture](#).

Bible link



*You are kind, God! Please have pity on me.
You are always merciful! Please wipe away my sins.
Wash me clean from all of my sin and guilt.
I know about my sins, and I cannot forget my terrible guilt.
You are really the one I have sinned against;
I have disobeyed you and have done wrong.
So it is right and fair for you to correct and punish me.
I have sinned and done wrong since the day I was born.
But you want complete honesty, so teach me true wisdom.
Wash me with hyssop until I am clean and whiter than snow.
Let me be happy and joyful!
You crushed my bones, now let them celebrate.
Turn your eyes from my sin and cover my guilt.
Create pure thoughts in me and make me faithful again.
Don't chase me away from you or take your Holy Spirit away from me.*

Psalm 51:1-11 (CEV)

It is said that David wrote this moving prayer for forgiveness in repentance for the terrible way he had behaved. He had stolen another man's wife and had that man sent into thick of the fighting, which meant certain death. It had taken a story from Nathan the prophet to bring David to his senses. It is a prayer from the heart and is often sung on the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday.

The full story of King David's sin can be found in 2 Samuel 11 and 12.

Wondering about this Bible story

- I wonder why David felt that it was God he had 'sinned against' as much as against Bathsheba and her husband.
- I wonder how David expected God to make him feel clean again.
- I wonder what David had learned about God and about himself from this experience of failure.

The story of this cross

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. The key theme of this season is repentance, and it is a time to saying sorry for all those things that have spoiled our lives, hurt others and broken our relationship with God. Only through repentance can friendship with God be restored and Christians be ready for the mystery and miracle of Easter.

In the week before Ash Wednesday, you could prepare your group for a Lenten focus on the cross by telling them about the custom of the cross of ashes given to worshippers on this day.

Some of the palm crosses from the previous year are carefully burned to create ash. During the worship, people are signed with an ash cross on their foreheads as a sign that they truly want to repent. In Baptism, Christians are signed with a 'water' cross on their foreheads. That marks a new



beginning in Christ. The cross of ashes on the forehead marks a decision to say sorry for what has been done wrong and to get ready to make a fresh start with Jesus again.

Sin is a big Bible word and it means much more than simply a major crime committed or an angry word spoken. According to the Bible, 'a sinner' - someone who sins - is more than simply a conscious, wilful wrong-doer.

To be someone who is 'in sin' is to be:

- someone who is deeply conscious of not being what he or she is meant to be;
- someone in need of healing, restoration and hope;
- someone who is not complete;
- someone who has been damaged by what others have done to him or her;
- someone who feels stained by what he or she has done to him or herself and others;
- someone who is painfully aware of the inner tension between aspiration and reality;
- someone who is longing to be a better person;
- someone who wants to be perfect even as God the heavenly Father is perfect;
- someone who is caught in a web of self-illusion, self-deceit and self-centredness that distorts the image of God in human beings - in other words, they imagine, pretend or believe that they are better than they are;
- someone who is crying for help.

This is the sin that messes up human lives and relationships and which Christians long to be rid of. Ash Wednesday's burnt cross is a symbol of a genuine sorrow for all this mess - the worshipper wants the sin to be burned up and destroyed - and it also represents the Christian hope that only the cross can truly deal with it all.

Here is a prayer for Ash Wednesday based on references and allusions to dust and to ashes found in the Bible (see Genesis 16:13; Job 42:6; Psalm 30:9; Psalm 103:14; Psalm 113:7; Isaiah 61:3 in the RSV; Hebrews 13:12).

*Lord God,
Although we are no more than dust and ashes,
We know that you love us
And that you offer:
To lift us up from the dust
And sit us on thrones;
To give us beauty instead of ashes
And clothe our weakness with honour;
To offer us a future that is beyond imagining,
In which this dust will praise you.
And this is all because Jesus died for us
In the place of dust and ashes at Golgotha.
Lord God, we thank you.*



Amen.

Crafting the cross

Under careful supervision, burn some of the palm crosses from the previous year. Use this ash to make cross marks for the 'T's which are the first and last letters of the phrase 'The season of LenT'. Each member of the group can make their own copy of this.

An appropriate Bible story for this session could be the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24), focusing particularly on the younger son. It is about repentance and coming back to God. His journey home - during which he rehearses his special repentance speech for his father - is a picture of the journey Christians make through Lent.

Cross reflection

*Dying for the world, here hung the world's life;
Cleansing all by that deadly stream of blood.
When you bowed your head, you raised the world higher than the stars
And, wonder of all time, your death created life.*

This a translation of part of a poem by Alcuin from the 8th century AD, with his thoughts about how the cross cleans up sin and helps believers start to life all over again.