**Sermon for Holy Cross Day**

**Texts:** Numbers 21:4–9; John 3:13–17  
**Theme:** *“Lifted Up for Our Healing”*

**Introduction**

If I was to show a big M in the front of the church, I’m guessing you’d all say it was a symbol of a well known burger chain. Apparently 88% of people in the world know this, but only 56% know the cross as the symbol of Christian faith. Yes so many people have it tattooed on them, or wear one round their necks without realising the significance. It is more than a historical object and today, on Holy Cross day, we are invited to explore why.

The two readings set before us today, from *Numbers 21* and *John 3*, draw a line that runs straight from Israel’s wilderness wanderings to Golgotha’s hill – where Jesus was crucified. They both show us how God turned a symbol of death into an instrument of healing and life. And they invite us to see the cross in a new way.

**1. The Bronze Serpent: A Type of Christ**

Let’s first look at the old testament reading.

The people of Israel, whose story is told in the first books of the Bible, were descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They believed they were chosen by God to live in covenant with him. Under Moses, they were freed from slavery in Egypt and began a long journey through the desert, heading toward the land God had promised them.

This journey was not easy. It was marked by hunger, thirst, fear, and disappointment. At times, the people’s trust in God wavered. They grumbled against Moses, they questioned God’s care, and they longed for the security of Egypt, even though it meant slavery.

Numbers 21 gives us one of those moments. The people, tired of wandering and tired of the manna God provided, spoke against God and against Moses. The text then says that God sent poisonous snakes among them, and many died.

Now, this detail makes many modern readers uncomfortable. How can a God of love send snakes to kill people? Would God really act in this way?

Here we need to remember that Israel, like all ancient peoples, interpreted the events of their lives through the lens of faith. If disaster struck, they often saw it as God’s judgment. If healing came, they saw it as God’s mercy. So when venomous snakes appeared, they understood this as God’s hand at work.

We don’t have to read the story as a literal description of God’s behaviour. Instead, we can read it as Israel’s attempt to make sense of their suffering and their relationship with God. The heart of the story is not the snakes, but what happens next: when the people repent, God provides a remedy. He instructs Moses to make a bronze serpent (basically a massive snake!), to lift it high upon a pole, and to invite the people to look upon it. And whoever looked was healed.

That is the heart of the passage. The very image of the thing that brought death became the means of life. What had caused fear and suffering became, through God’s provision, the instrument of healing.

The church has long recognized this as a **“type of Christ”**—an Old Testament foreshadowing of what God would one day do in Jesus.

Jesus himself makes this connection explicit in John 3: *“Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life”* (John 3:14-15).

The serpent on the pole was not magical. It was effective only because God appointed it as the means of healing, pointing forward to Christ who would be lifted up on the cross. The Israelites who looked in faith at that bronze serpent were healed of their deadly wounds. Likewise, all who look in faith to Christ crucified are healed of the venom of all that is bad, and granted eternal healing.

For the world, the cross looks like defeat. It was Rome’s cruellest form of punishment, designed to shame and destroy. But for Christians, it is the place where victory was won.

*I remember in Amberley… Good Friday.*

Powerful?

Theologian John Stott put it memorably: *“The cross is the blazing fire at which the flame of our love is kindled, but we have to get near enough for its sparks to fall on us.”* The cross is not simply something we observe from afar; it is where our lives are transformed.

**3. Three Ways of Looking at the Cross**

Let us consider three perspectives on the cross that can deepen our faith.

**(a) The Cross as Healing**

Like the bronze serpent, the cross is God’s remedy for what poisons us. We all know we don’t always make good choices. We call this sin It corrupts our relationships, and makes our lives full of regret and sadness. But in Christ crucified, we find healing.

Peter writes: *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed”* (1 Peter 2:24).

This is not just a metaphor. It is a reality. Jesus takes our sin, like in a huge black bag, and it doesn’t have to weigh us down. It dies with him on the cross, and as he rises the weight it lifted. For us this happens in the forgiveness of sins, the and the mending of our brokenness— when we look at the cross and believe this we find it’s healing power.

**(b) The Cross as Victory**

The cross is not only about forgiveness; it is also about triumph. Colossians 2:15 tells us that at the cross, Christ *“disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, triumphing over them.”*

To the naked eye, Jesus’ crucifixion looked like defeat. But the mystery here is that the cross was the battlefield where the powers of sin and death. The resurrection is the public declaration of that victory, but the battle was won on the cross.

That means we do not fight for victory as Christians—we fight from victory. The power of sin is broken. Death has lost its sting. The enemy has been defeated.

*In my life – light overcomes darkness. Hope.*

**(c) The Cross as Love**

Finally, the cross is the supreme revelation of God’s love. John 3:16, the most famous verse in Scripture, is not a generic statement about God’s benevolence. It is specifically about the cross: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”*

Jesus came for us. For you and for me.

Called to faith, to look to the cross to be healed. Like the bronze serpent.

Called to hope, to know that whatever happens to us, and whatever is happening in your life light will overcome darkness. Victory is won.

Called to love, Jesus came for you and so we love and serve one another.

**Conclusion**

Holy Cross Day is not merely about looking back at an ancient instrument of execution. It is about looking up—to the One who was lifted up for us. It is about seeing in the cross the faith -being healed, hope – knowing we have the victory, and love – Jesus came for you.

Look up!