



CONTEMPLATING LENT A journey with artist Sophie Hacker

Week Two – Tuesday 2 March

This week Sophie discusses 'The Covid Cross' which she made during Holy Week 2020 - the start of lockdown.

Today I'd like to share a piece I made last year, called the Covid Cross. It was an especially dark Lent in 2020. We were at the start of the first national lockdown, none of us knew how this pandemic was going to play out - not just in our own lives, but across the entire world.

There's a story deep in the pages of the Old Testament, Numbers 21, it's all about facing fear. The Israelites were wandering in the wilderness. They were freed from slavery, but life was really tough. Along with shortages of basic necessities, they were plagued by poisonous serpents. But God offered a solution. He told Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it high on a pole, so that those who had been bitten could look on it and live.

John 3 v 14 refers to this story, when he talks about the Son of Man being 'lifted up'

During Holy Week last year, I worked on a cross from recycled wood. The wood comes from an old, discarded palette. The surface is rough and weathered, and there's evidence of lots of previous nails, a few of which still remain. I'm very keen on using a symbolic language of colour when I paint. It's used in icons, and lots of historical movements in art, where colours are seen as having an almost inherent meaning. I've glazed this cross with a range of transparent green and bluish pigments. These colours stand for the renewal of creation. I've also used a finely ground gold powder, which stands for God's Glory.

With the Moses story in mind, I've added representations of the virus. It's disturbing to see this ominous, spiky foreign body being absorbed into the cross, but it makes the same point as the Moses story. We must face what we most fear in order to overcome it.

This Lent, we're in quite a different place. As we seem to be slowly emerging from a year of anxiety, loss and restriction, I'd like to offer another way we can grow. It's tempting to take the view that the horror of the pandemic is something to forget about as soon as we can, but it seems we've been offered an extraordinary opportunity to learn deeply about ourselves, about our society, and about creation. Whilst we continue to sit with the uncomfortable spiky feelings and memories of the past twelve months, still in our 'locked-down' state, let's offer God our fears, failures, frustrations, and our lack. He will absorb it all, and offer us healing and freedom.