

+WEEKLY REFLECTION

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A Preston Easter Tradition

I spend a good deal of time speaking and being with people of other faiths. They are not shy about their beliefs and being known as a Sikh, a Muslim or a Hindu.

Male Sikhs will often wear a turban and grow a beard; signs of being a baptised Sikh (their terms not mine).

Muslim women will often wear a hijab (a simple cloth covering their hair) and Hindus will often have a small red marking on the forehead - some apply these marks daily to keep their deities at the centre of their thoughts.

They will often have parades through the city to mark significant events in their calendars. These parades are treated with great respect and many, sometimes thousands of people will participate. They are proud to represent their faiths.

Every year, on Good Friday in Preston, we hold a solemn march of witness through the city centre, finishing on the Flag Market square where we hold short service of remembrance. A large cross is carried by several Christians - it's quite large and heavy, approximately the size of one that would have held our Lord.

One year I couldn't find a Christian to help to join the team - it takes about six of us - so I asked a Muslim friend of mine to join us. He agreed and together we carried the cross through the city.

His participation felt like the passage in the Gospel of Luke: 23:26. As they led him away, they seized Simon of Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. My Muslim friend was unique, I agree. But he wasn't ashamed to be associated with Christians at this event. We are often reminded of Peter and his denial of our Lord.

This Easter time may each one of us be more open and proud to be a follower of Jesus.

Everyone is welcome to join the procession. Meet outside the Fishergate Shopping Centre, near to Preston Railway Station. 11am Friday 3 April.

Canon Andrew Pratt MBE, Interfaith Adviser