

## Crosses

Take up your cross!

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves  
and take up their cross and follow me.”

Who really understands the depth of what Jesus means- who can comprehend it?

I remember a number of years ago when my parish combined with  
another Episcopal Church to experience the Alpha program-

(It's a course in basic Christianity developed by an English priest- Nicky Gumble.  
—about 14 sessions, I think.)

The format is that you have dinner, then watch a video by Nicky-  
and then there are small group discussions.

Early on in the course, Nicky was talking about some of the things Christians do  
that other people just don't understand-

He said it's possible we've done these things so long  
we don't understand them ourselves-

At one point he put something on a long cord around his neck-  
it was a gallows with a hangman's noose—of course everybody gasped.

He said- “Do you have any idea how radical it is that we wear an instrument of death  
around our necks? what if we wore an electric chair-on a chain around our necks?...

I wouldn't advocate that- but Nicky certainly got our attention!

I read about a woman who went into a jewelry store to buy a cross-

The young clerk- pre-occupied and oblivious to tradition- said

“Do you want a plain one - or one with the little man on it?”

I think people in general still know the cross as a Christian symbol-

they might notice how ornate it is- but my sense is that not many people today

look at a person wearing a cross and immediately think-

“there’s somebody who’s decided to lose their life for the sake of the gospel”

It’s more likely they look at it as a piece of jewelry

What would you do if somebody stopped you on the street and said

“That’s an unusual necklace- does it mean anything?”

You might say “I’m a follower of Jesus Christ and he died on a cross out of love for us-

But would you say...

“and he told us to deny ourselves and take up our cross if we want to follow him

and he said that if we wanted to save our lives, we’d lose them-

but if we lost our lives for his sake, we’d save them.”

Can you explain what that means to somebody who doesn’t know?

I’m profoundly grateful that God loves me so much that he gave his Son-

I can talk about that! — that’s good news-

but what about the second part of what Jesus had to say...?

I have to think a while about letting go of my life and taking up a cross of my own.

*-and what does that mean for us-*

Paul, in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians (1:23) says “Christ crucified is a stumbling block to the Jews

and foolishness to Gentiles.”

Our instinct to embrace Jesus’ goodness while avoiding the blood of the cross  
is a “stumbling block” to God’s mission to the world.

Wanting his ethics but not his cross is to shut out the power of God  
and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:24)

Joseph Campbell, in his book *The Power of Myth* said

\*\*“the cross symbolizes not only the one historic moment on Calvary,  
but *the mystery through time and space of God’s presence and participation  
in the agony of all living things.*”

God suffered-                      God suffered for us-                      God suffers with us!!  
  
This is heavy duty!

If taking up our cross draws us more deeply into life in God  
we need to ponder what the implications of that life in God might be.

Is it not to participate in the sufferings of the world- to love, sacrificially

Evelyn Underhill, the English ,mystic expresses the same thought:

“Those who complain that they make no progress in the Christian life  
because they cannot meditate should examine, not their capacity for meditation  
but their capacity for suffering and love.

For there is a hard and costly element , a deep seriousness,  
a critical choice, in all genuine religion.”

It is the choice of whether or not to participate, out of love, in the sufferings of others.”  
I think that’s what Paul is getting at in his letter to the Romans.

There's a long list of how to live as Christians- if you notice, some of it's logical-  
we'd have expected it- but then, some of it's pretty counter-cultural.

We could all agree that we're to hate what is evil-

to love each other with genuine affection-

to be there for those who mourn- laugh with those who laugh- that's the easy part-

The hard part comes when Paul begins to talk about how to relate to people we don't like-  
people who take advantage of us-

He says "never avenge yourself- vengeance is mine, says the Lord-

feed your enemies- if they're thirsty give them something to drink"-

Put the other person first- whether they're friends or enemies-

enter into the other's suffering-

God in Jesus Christ suffered on the cross for us-

God is still present in suffering-

We're called to take up our cross- to enter into the sufferings of the world

Christianity makes no sense if it's reduced to a mere system of ethics.

The next time somebody comes up to you, looks at your cross and says "nice jewelry"-

maybe- after you tell them about how God loves us all,

you might tell them that those who follow the way of Jesus

carry a cross of *their* own-

our cross is the thing that connects us to the depths of real life!

Jesus said ..those who want to save their life will lose it

and those who lose their life for my sake will find it *Amen.*