

To all of God's children at Manatee Life,

SCRIPTURE:

Galatians 2:20-21 (MSG) – Galatians 2:11-21

Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central.

STORY:

A Pastor on Northern Vancouver Island wrote to online study group this message:

"I'm having difficulty with the Gospel this week; what is this cross that I am to take up, and what am I to deny in following Jesus?"

Another Pastor, a student minister in the United States wrote:

"I find this a hard gospel text because it talks about suffering rather than joy."

OBSERVATION:

The Cross – Jesus' and our own - stands at the center of the Christian faith. If we are honest with ourselves we will admit that we have all struggled with the meaning that it carries not only for Jesus, but also for our lives ... lived out on a daily basis. We would much prefer a faith of celebration and joy instead of one of suffering, shame and suffering.

While struggling with this central role of the cross, I came across the online discussion sighted above about the role and purpose of the cross. While it doesn't answer any profound questions concerning the purpose nevertheless it did cause me to pause to contempt its central role. I think that over the next several days I probably will be thinking about the cross more than I would normally would have. This online discussion has set me on a quest ... a spiritual quest of sorts ... maybe it will do the same for you. l.

The cross has always caused problems to people. Brutal and barbaric – the cross was a tool of political power for the Romans. They maintained their power because of the fear of death on the cross.

When one was condemned by the state, the condemned literally had to "take up his cross" and carry it to the public place where he was to be crucified. It was part of the humiliation process, the mechanism of social control for which crucifixion was invented.

The cross was an instrument of suffering and shame - and no more so than among the Children of Israel - where the scriptures themselves declare: "cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree". Besides that cruel reality was the shame of being stripped bare of any

outward garment. So there the crucified hung, naked, exposed, humiliated and defeated.

To die on a cross was a sign that one died cut off from God, and cut off from the people of God - a sign that the person was rejected. And of course in the case of Jesus this was very true.

The Cross is not a piece of beautiful jewelry or something to place upon the altar of the church or something to hang on our walls ... it is more than any of that. The Pastor's question should cause us to stop and contemplate its fuller and deeper meaning. I would be interested in hearing about your quest of understanding.

QUOTE:

The cross cannot be defeated, for it is defeat. – G. K. Chesterton

PRAYER:

We sing with a sense of joy about the Old Rugged Cross or In The Cross of Christ I Glory or Beneath the Cross of Jesus or a number of other "favorite" hymns. And Lord, as we sing our hearts out, it never really dawns on us about the suffering that Christ went through. And then, to be asked to "take up our cross"?!? That's a major struggle. Help us, dear Jesus, help us now! Amen

And the faith journey continues, Pastor Jim
Jmartin450@tampabay.rr.com
386-795-5323

If you would like to attend the taping of our Worship Service tomorrow (Wednesday) at 10:00 you are invited to do so. Enter by the north sanctuary door, wear a mask, practice physical distancing, no cell phones, talking or whispering during the taping.

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