

Gospel – John 12:31-36A

Holy Cross Day

9.21.19 Sermon

Patti Case



Our Collect each week provides the “cliff notes” for the theme of the service. So I wonder if you might indulge me by returning to the Collect on page 5 and reading it with me.

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross that he might draw the whole world to himself: Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have grace to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Mercifully grant that we, who glory in the mystery of our redemption, may have grace to take up our cross and follow him.

Well, of course I do that! I’m here, aren’t I?

Consider, though, the story we all know of the crucifixion. The countless episodes of betrayal. The march through the streets of Jerusalem and to Golgotha, the place of the Skull. The humiliation, the jeers and wailing and crying. Nails in the hands and feet, the sun beating down, vinegar for the parched tongue. Pain. Pain. Pain that only death can relieve.

So you think you take up the cross and bear it by showing up to church each Sunday? Really?

I’m not bringing this up to make you all feel guilty. Well, maybe I am, a little bit, but the fact is, I forget all the time that I am a Christian, that the one truth that **Jesus died for me** should remain above all others as I go about my daily life.

As they say, how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.

After working in the wood products industry my entire career, I know something about wood. And the cross was made from wood. So I’m going to go with wood analogies. Paper is made out of wood. I take up a piece of paper just about every day, when I turn the page in my book or carry a piece of music or photocopy a report that I’ve got to share at a meeting. Paper is lightweight, it gets a little messy when you’ve got a lot of it but it’s pretty portable. So, can we agree that we might, just might, be able to take up a piece of paper for Jesus? Maybe not a whole cross, but at least that much? How would we do that? By greeting a stranger in the name of Christ? By invoking his name, not when traffic is bad but when it actually spits us out in Seattle on time for once? How might we share our faith, just a little bit? How did you share your faith this last week?

OK, so we’ve got paper. How about a splinter of wood? Splinters can be painful, they can fester and become infected. Jesus likely felt the burn of a hundred splinters in his back as he was lifted upon the cross. But – not to worry. That pain was soon replaced by hurt so much greater it was probably forgotten. And yet. How can we take up a splinter? How might we provide a thought or a comment, a story or a word that festers? We want to have friends, we want to be in the in crowd, and probably

causing pain isn't the way to be cool. But we're asked to take up the cross. And this – this is merely a splinter of that cross.

Before I returned to St. David's Father Joe did that with me. Every time he saw me he was friendly, gregarious, always bantering. And every time we parted, he seemed to leave me with a splinter that would fester until I saw him again – and then he would add another one. So...what splinters are you leaving behind?

As they say, go big or go home. So let's get a little bigger than a splinter. In my travels to the south, I've learned that wood matting is a thing. Plywood or other panels are put down to help lift trucks and machinery above the muck during the rainy season, so that construction projects can continue apace. It's the same principle as the old skid road of the early logging days, where logs were placed perpendicular to the path and greased so that oxen or horses could drag logs to the water for transport. Or the boardwalks that were built in downtown Shelton to keep people from sinking into the mire as they walked from place to place to conduct their business. We provide boardwalks for people when we serve them. Donations of shampoo and soap, socks and oh, yes, money to lift our neighbors. Our hands cooking and serving dinner at Community Lifeline. Listening, helping when confusion or grief or anger or sadness threaten to lock our fellow humans in the sucking mud of their lives. How can we, how do we provide matting, a skid road?

It's the gift of our hearts that truly fits the metaphor of taking up the cross. And that's tough stuff, when our friends and neighbors and the strangers on the street are skeptical and even suspicious about following Jesus. In the face of Hitler and Hezbollah, how do we convince our fellow humans to follow Christ?

I think there are enough stories in the Bible to help us understand how to model His love. But here's one more. James Wells, moderator of the Free Church of Scotland, in 1884 shared a story in his book, The Parables of Jesus, of a little girl carrying a great big baby boy. When asked whether she was tired, she replied, "No, he's not heavy, he's my brother." That story eventually inspired Bobby Scott and Bob Russell to write the ballad that The Hollies made famous, "He ain't heavy, he's my brother." Maybe the next time you're stumped as to how to take up the cross, you can sing that song inside your head.

The road is long
With many a winding turn
That leads us to who knows where
Who knows where
But I'm strong
Strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy
He's my brother.

Take up the cross. One piece of paper, one splinter, one 2x4 at a time.

Amen.