

CROSS BEARERS

A SERMON FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT
MARCH 1, 2015
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
MARIANNA, FLORIDA
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MARK 8:31-38

If it seems like I preached on this text just a few months ago, you've got a good memory. It was actually the Matthew 10 parallel to this Mark passage, but it was the lectionary lesson on the second Sunday of August last year.

In that sermon, I made the point that of all the symbols of Christianity, the cross is the simplest and most obvious. The cross reminds us that Jesus died on a cross for our sins, and the emptiness of the cross as opposed to a crucifix, reminds us that Jesus is risen for our hope.

I also made the point that some folks wear the cross as ornamentation, as jewelry, as the theme for a tattoo, and one must wonder if some of the folks who wear the cross have any clue at all about what it means to be a Christian.

The theme of that sermon in August was self-denial. Self-denial is what Lent is all about, so the theme is better now than it was in August, in that season known as Ordinary Time.

But as I rambled around in my mind preparing for this sermon, it wasn't the theme of self-denial that struck me. It was the difference between a cross wearer and a cross bearer.

There may well be someone here this morning wearing a cross tattoo, or a cross necklace, or cross earrings, or a neck-tie with crosses on it. Polly wore here boots with the inlaid crosses to supper and Bible study Wednesday evening. We 21st Century Christians are cross wearers.

Do you remember the old saying, "We've all got our cross to bear"?

One of my aunts, one of my father's sisters, would sigh deeply, and utter those words. It might be after she'd heard about a woman caring for an invalid husband. It might be after she heard about a child stricken with some dread disease such as polio. It might be after she'd heard about someone's alcoholic spouse having fallen off the wagon. It might be when she heard that one of the neighbors had been diagnosed with psoriasis.

"We've all got our cross to bear."

Do we? Does each of us have a sorrow, a problem, a burden, that we must bear through life, suffering all the way? Maybe suffering in silence but suffering none the less?

Try as I might, I cannot find that in the Bible.

Or even in the hymns of the church.

What I do find are hymns like "Jesus I My Cross Have Taken, all to leave and follow Thee," in which the singer leaves the state of "destitute, despised, forsaken" to "haste...from grace to glory."

Or how about "Lift High the Cross?" "Lift High the Cross, the love of Christ proclaim, Till all the world adore His sacred name."

All of us have heard the story of the little boy who went to church looking for Gladly, the cross-eyed bear! That old hymn really does not exist, but there is one that is close: Gladly the cross I would bear.

And there is not actually a consecrated cross eyed bear in the old hymn, "Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone?" but that may be where my aunt got her idea. The lyric goes:

Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me.

How happy are the saints above who once went sorrowing here.
But now they taste unmingled love, and joy without a tear.

Here it comes:

The consecrated cross I'll bear, till death shall set me free.
And then go home my crown to wear, for there's a crown for me.

And the final verse goes:

O precious cross! O glorious crown! O resurrection day!
When Christ the Lord from heaven comes down and bears my soul away.

There is a cross for everyone, but it is the same cross, the cross of Christ. I can't find that everyone has a particular individual cross to bear.

What I do find is summed up in some of the words from "Blessed Be The Ties That Bind": "we share our mutual woes; our mutual burdens bear, and often for each other flows a sympathizing tear."

If our neighbor has a cross to bear, then it is our place as a Christian to grab hold of it and help carry it.

Simon the Cyrene may well be the model for Christians. Remember him? He was the man picked at random out of the crowd in the streets of Jerusalem on Good Friday to help carry the cross on which Jesus was crucified to the hill called Calvary. When we see another bearing a cross, are we to stand idly by and watch that person struggle? When we see someone beaten bloody by life bowed down under a heavy load, are we to jeer at them, throw rocks at them, add to their misery?

No. We are the cross bearers. We lift high the cross. And we share each other's burdens, so that no one, not even Jesus, has to bear the cross alone.

Cross wearers are one thing and cross bearers yet another. I hope to be included in both categories, and I hope you are, too.