

# MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY AUGUST 4, 2019

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## "The Old Rugged Cross"

Based on Matthew 27:27-37

I begin today, by telling again, a short story shared with the congregation last week while introducing the Vacation Bible School for this summer. After worship I found myself humming "The Old Rugged Cross."

It's summertime! And like many other churches during this time of the year, we get a little silly, a little creative, and open our doors to the young people of our community with a Vacation Bible School. While serving another church, I was assisting at the Registration Table one summer, as we knew we would have close to 40 young children arriving. A small child, about four years old, shyly came forward with her mother to get her name tag. Her mother quietly explained that they had never been to a church before, but with her daughter starting school in the fall, she thought this might be a good way to test the waters. We gave the little girl her name tag, and lead her into the Sanctuary where other boys and girls were waiting. She stared up at the Cross, high on the wall, turned with excited eyes to her mother and said, 'Oh Mommy, this is a God place!'

How did she know that the church was a "God Place?" How did she know that the symbol of the Cross had something to do with matters of faith of which she had no experience or understanding?

AS THEY WERE  
GOING OUT, THEY  
MET A MAN FROM  
CYRENE, NAMED  
SIMON, AND THEY  
FORCED HIM TO  
CARRY THE  
CROSS.

~MATTHEW 27:32

- She did not know the Good Friday story of old, of those horrific and terrifying hours in Jerusalem, with Pilate and the priests jockeying for position, pressuring and pointing fingers at who would finally be the one to send an innocent man to his death.

- She did not know the Roman's lust for blood and the use of terror as a tool for crowd control; that death was

cheap and the torture unbearable.

- She did not know that Easter Sunday is more than a story about Peter Cottontail, chocolate eggs to hunt, and perhaps a family feast with Grandma and Grandpa. Yet, this young girl looked at the Cross on the wall, and knew that God was present there. And that's the tricky part for we believers and disciples of the faith. Because we know the story of the Cross. When we look at the Cross on Sunday morning as we prepare for worship, we automatically connect the story of Holy Week with the wonder of Resurrection Morning and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

- We know that Christ on the Cross represents the sacrifice of our Saviour, the suffering of a death not deserved, of forgiveness, of atonement, the

*"The emblem of suffering and shame."*

~from The Old Rugged Cross

- We know that the empty Cross of Easter morning symbolizes hope, new beginnings, and second chances.

- We know these things. But the world does not.

Yet...

- When the world sees the Cross, or enters a church sanctuary or hospital chapel with a Cross, or has reason to be in the presence of someone like me, who wears a Cross, it gives them pause.

- The world at large may not believe as we do, but when troubles become too great to bear alone, they often find themselves drawn to the Cross.

- The world may not understand atonement, but when suffering, the world turns to our Cross for comfort. (think Red Cross)

For the Cross is more than just a Good Friday story. The Cross is more than just an Easter Sunday story. The Cross is more than a heavy piece of wood, carried by a bystander the Romans happened upon:

*"...a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross." (v32)*

- The Cross has power that transcends those events so long ago at Calvary.
- The Cross has the power to speak to a world that does not always want to listen.

- The Cross has the power to speak to believers who do not always want to listen!

- The Cross soothes, protects, stands tall, and bears the weight of the world so that others may find shelter within its shadow.

> The Cross faces out into the Sanctuary, glows warmly into the night sky of our communities, or glistens in gold ink on the covers of our favourite Bible. It's glimmer reminds everyone who sees it or touches it, that wherever it is, God is there also.

> The other side of the Cross faces in: towards your heart if you are wearing a necklace or towards the walls of a church building where the wood is anchored, a reminder of the strength of God, the unshakeable nature of faith, of resilience through stormy seas life tosses our way.

> And between the Cross which faces out, and the Cross which faces in, there is a plane, an invisible line between out and in, an impenetrable barrier from the things of the world that would try and tear you down. Yet, at the same time, a permeable film which coaxes you to not remain closed away from the world, but to let your light shine.

Perhaps...

- When the world is not ready to yet hear the stories of Jesus, the Cross is quietly rests, filling the space with God's presence and protecting the spirit of the one who listens in the silence.

- When the world is not ready to make Sunday morning worship a part of their routine, the Cross on the outside of our building quietly reminds those who pass that there are times and places in life, when one needs whisper of a Saviour.

- When the world attempts to claim that there is no God and no need of God anymore, the flicker of the light bouncing off your cross lapel pin or brooch or necklace reminds those who see it, that there are still those who do believe, and need God in their lives.

**How will you carry your Cross?**

**How do you wear your Cross?**

**How do you live your Cross?**

*So I'll cherish the  
old rugged cross  
Till my trophies at  
last I lay down  
And I will cling to the  
old rugged cross  
And exchange it some day  
for a crown*