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What does the cross mean to you?

Can you remember a time when someone said something to you which causes you to pause and think ?wait a minute I am not sure that is how I think, I'm not sure that is what I believe.' A while ago I was with a group of people chatting about the joys and challenges of life. One person began sharing with us a story about a family he knew who had a child with multiple disabilities. As that child grew so did the challenges and at times these could feel overwhelming for the family. When he concluded his remarks with, ?Well that is the cross this family has to bear' is when the red light went on for me. Is that what the symbol of the cross is all about? Do we see all the negatives in life as the crosses we carry? How often have you heard someone speak of a difficult situation and then heard them say ?well that is just my cross to bear.' The more I thought of this image of the cross as an image of suffering the more impassioned I became.

Many people wear a cross on a chain. As I talked to people and asked them why they wore this cross they would often say because someone they care about gave it to them, because it is a Christian symbol, because it reminds them of Christ, and some said it was just the thing to do.

Most of our Christian denominations speak of the cross as the sacrifice Jesus endured, crucifixion, as necessary to effect the redemption of humanity's sins. But that is not the end of the story. The cross surely has a dual meaning of both suffering and triumph.

When I was in Barbados this past winter I had the opportunity to visit Codrington College which is over 200 years old. It is the Anglican training college in the Caribbean for those studying for the priesthood. The principal is very dynamic and challenging individual. One thing he said to me was ?Penny you may be shocked but I don't believe in original sin, I believe we are born blessed by God.? I wasn't shocked because I too do not believe in the concept of ?original sin' but rather in the belief of ?original blessing' [Matthew Fox].

So this takes us back to the question, how do we understand the meaning behind the cross. If we don't believe that Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice to cleanse human kind from sin then why did he die, what meaning can we find in his death. One might be that he died, that he was killed because he was too much of a challenge to those in power, he was a popular speaker, teacher, healer with a large following whose teachings and behavior was challenging the status quo of those who held the power, the Jewish and Roman authorities. He was seen as a threat to those who held the reins of power. Did he know that he was a threat to those in power? I imagine so as did Martin Luther king, Nelson Mendella, Oscar Ramero. Think of the prophets in the Hebrew scriptures, or Malala Yousafzai, the young woman who stood up for the education of girls and was shot by the Taliban. When we are called to love God with all our heart, mind and soul, this is a call to action, to stand up and challenge the injustices of this world.

In many ways the cross is a call to justice making, a sign of hope that life calls us to live more fully. Yes most do have challenges in the journey of life but those are not a cross to carry but rather a burden to bear. The symbol of the cross is about resurrection, new life. Yes there probably will be struggles along the way if the status quo is challenged. Just think of the journey of our first Nations folk who have carried a tremendous burden as a result of the efforts that were to taken to ?take the Indian out of the child'. The damage that the aboriginals suffered is not their ?cross to bear' but rather a traumatizing burden that held no sign of new life, no sign of resurrection. The cross shines forth when there are signs of healing, of new life, of resurrection not when some one or something is caught in the grips of suffering'.

I wonder does any of this make any sense to you? Perhaps you don't agree with me. It would seem that no one has the corner on the truth, rather it evolves over time.

I become impassioned when the Cross gets depicted as a situation of suffering and stops there. How about you?

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