

O91309.doc **HE WAS PIERCED FOR OUR OFFENSES** (Time spent looking at a crucifix and reflecting on what we see leads us to find meaning in that cross and our own.)

“And they shall look on him whom they have pierced.” As I stand before you I hold up a large crucifix. As I speak keep your eyes on the cross. This is not Lent. This is not Holy Week. This is not Good Friday. But it is a day when the Church asks us to break our normal Sunday routine and fix our gaze on Christ and Him crucified. Let us together embark on a journey reflective but not maudlin. Why is the crucifixion so powerful for us? When we stop and truly gaze it has a power to draw us in. It has the power to speak to us at a level deeper than the surface level at which we live much of our lives. The cross symbolizes for us all the evil of human nature gone wrong. We are touched by the hatred, the pain, the betrayal, the abandonment, the helplessness, the desperate and destructive savagery of it all.

But the crucifix is also powerful because of the Man/God who hangs on it. We know his struggle to come to grips with it. “Father, take this cup away from me. Still, not my will but Thine be done.” Not my will but thy will. What does that mean? Is it the will of God the Father that his Son dies this ignominious death? No. God is love and the incarnate word of God made flesh is love incarnate, compassionate love, truthful love. God asks of his own to be true to himself, be true to that love, be true in his own integrity. And if being true leads to terrible things to be endured then the Father does not shrink from asking that of his Beloved Son.

But why the Cross? God’s word of creation that forged the design of the universe, this earth and all that inhabit here has been contradicted. By whom? By us. We are the ones who have said: “We will not serve. We will not trust. We will not obey. We will not accept our creatureliness and limited status.” We are the ones who wanted what we thought would be more and better and on our own terms. All of that has contradicted what God has established.

How can we get ourselves out of such a mess of our own making? We cannot. We need another to come to rescue us and set us free. We need another to come to restore us to our rightful places as daughters and sons of the Most High God. This can only be done if there is one who will willingly embrace our contradiction and thus overcome its destructive force. What is it that can overcome that obstinacy and self-indulgence? Only love, self-sacrificing love, Godly love. So Jesus embraces the crux of our “No” to God and takes it on and makes it his own in order to purify us and restore us as his adopted brothers and sisters. This cross then- takes on another meaning than that of vile instrument of torture. The cross then begins to be a sign of how far love will go, how far God will go to bring us back from the death of sin. There is no cheap grace though. There is no easy fix. There is no clever shortcut. There is no way around the cross. It must be embraced. And so Jesus embraces that which is not his own. And he does that for us and for his Father. And in that very embrace the seeds of resurrection are sown. Love DOES conquer all--sin and death. My friends, we are all sinners but only those who admit their sin and its negative power in their lives are the ones who begin to find meaning in the cross as its shadow falls across their own lives.

Jesus actually teaches his last and greatest lesson from the pulpit that is the cross, that lonely wooden tower. He teaches us the proper and best attitude toward suffering, toward injustices done to our person, rejection, betrayal, hardness of heart. He is teaching us from the cross how to live, to be really alive, in such a way that we cannot die forever. My friends, the cross cannot be escaped. It can be embraced over and over again. Only in Christ’s cross do we get a glimpse of what fruit the new tree of life can grow.