

THE UGLY CROSS

Wednesday, March 8

Reading: John 3

John 3:14 *Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in Him.* **16** *For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

There are many different images of the cross today. We see it affixed to the top of church steeples or overlaid with gold in a beautiful sanctuary. We hang it around our necks and in our ears as jewelry and stamp it on our Bibles for decoration. In many ways, the cross has become a beautiful thing in church-world today.

Now I'm not really against all those things, for the cross of Christ is a beautiful thing because of what it means. It is the way in which God showed His love for us and made our eternal salvation possible. But I believe we must also never lose sight of the ugliness of the cross. Of the horrible price that bought us salvation.

One of the most unique pictures of the cross comes from the Old Testament book of Numbers. Because of their constant complaining against Him, God sent poisonous snakes into the camp. People were dying and they cried out to Moses. God instructed Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who looked in faith at that snake on the pole would live (Numbers 21:4-89).

In explaining His mission to a confused Pharisee named Nicodemus, Jesus used this story to point to Himself. He would become that snake on the pole. To be saved the ancient Israelites had to look with faith at the image of the very thing that was killing them - the snake. So Jesus would become the very thing that is killing us - sin! When He hung on that cross Jesus became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). All the punishment for our disobedience was poured on Him. Not a pretty picture or golden decoration!

This is what it means that "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son." This is what it cost Jesus to make our forgiveness possible! Like those Israelites of old, we must look with faith upon the One who became the image of our sin and receive His free gift of eternal life.

POINTS TO PONDER:

Next time you see a cross or celebrate the Lord's Table, take a moment to think about the horror of the cross - the terrible price Jesus was willing to pay - - - for you! Let it change your attitude and then you can truly sing with the old hymn by Fanny Crosby:

Jesus, keep me near the cross / There a precious fountain—
Free to all, a healing stream— / Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.
In the cross, in the cross / Be my glory ever;
Till my raptured soul shall find / Rest beyond the river.

READING THE STORY: Mark 1-3