

## **The Old Rugged Cross, by Rev. George Bennard**

"I was praying for a full understanding for the cross and its plan in Christianity. I read and studied and prayed. I saw Christ and the Cross inseparably. The Christ of the Cross became more than a symbol... it was like seeing John 3:16 (For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.") leave the printed page, take form and act out on the meaning of redemption. While watching this scene with my mind's eye, the theme of the song came to me, and with it the melody." —Rev. George Bennard

"My late husband began writing this song in 1912, and he wrote it over a period of a year. During that year he went through a very severe 'life test' which inspired him to write it. He told the story in every state of the Union, except two, Utah and Louisiana." —Mrs. Hannah Bennard

### The Old Rugged Cross

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross  
The emblem of suffering and shame  
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best  
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

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

Oh, that old rugged cross, so despised by the world  
Has a wondrous attraction for me  
For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above  
To bear it to dark Calvary.

In the old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine  
A wondrous beauty I see  
For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died  
To pardon and sanctify me.

To the old rugged cross I will ever be true  
Its shame and reproach gladly bear  
Then He'll call me some day to my home far away  
Where His glory forever I'll share.

September 7, 2008: "P.S..."

This morning I'd like to offer a bit of a review of our journey through stewardship.

Jesus spoke of freedom, but he spoke of a different kind of freedom: the type of freedom that comes not through power but through submission. We must understand that all is God's. Ownership is a false representation of stewardship before God. It is not what we have that matters, it is how we use it for the greater honor and glory of God that counts. And it is not through control but through surrender that we live out a faithful Christian life.

God wants to emancipate his people; he wants to set us free. He wants his people to not be slaves but sons & daughters. He wants us to be governed not by law but by love.

We have been liberated from our own guilt and our own legalism. We have the freedom to pray and the freedom to love the God of our heart. And we have been forgiven by the only one who could condemn us. We are truly free! Now this begs the question, can we learn to live together in love, building each other up as the Body of Christ, or will we chose to tear it down with our own personal agendas and sin?

Which will you choose? Will you choose to be a slave to sin and guilt or will you choose to be free? Will you choose the world or will you choose Christ? Last Sunday many recommitted to the Way of the Cross.

Today God offers us insight through the verses of Matthew 18:15-20. It is one of many scripture texts that have been used to harm others. These six verses are not meant to be a declaration of power, nor do these verses mean that if two or three people agree on something, then they can ignore others and

do whatever they want. These six verses are about listening and accountability and about a larger vision of God's kingdom.

If one looks at these verses in the context of chapter 18, one notices the hyperbole Jesus uses in a series of brief teachings. Some of these teachings we choose to take literally, and some we don't. For example, we don't drown others for being "stumbling blocks." And we don't encourage people to pluck out their eyes or cut off body parts because they've sinned. And most shepherds might not abandon 99 sheep to go looking for one sheep. Jesus' exaggerated response to Peter's question about forgiveness in verse 21 shows that he knows we want forgiveness to be a quick and simple answer although it's not.

What is the kernel of truth that is embedded in each of these teachings, especially in verses 15-20? What is Jesus trying to teach the disciples, and us, by using such exaggeration?

Chapter 18 begins with the disciples coming to Jesus with the question, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" I imagine Jesus being wide-eyed at what he was hearing. Were they seriously asking this of Jesus, whose ministry had always focused on the least?

Yet he doesn't dismiss their self-centered and self-righteous question. He takes them seriously, listens carefully and then responds, not with a direct or literal answer, but with several teachings and with exaggeration. Jesus pushes the disciples to think, to listen and to be accountable to others for the power they hold. The exaggeration allows the disciples the opportunity to learn without being embarrassed and to listen without becoming defensive. Jesus points them back to the "children," the "little ones," "the one that went astray," "the one not listened to" and "the fellow slave." The kingdom of God is not concerned with "who's the greatest," Jesus teaches; the kingdom of God is about using power to care for the least and most vulnerable.

We must listen to and read texts like these carefully and honor the questions and tensions they raise for us. If we listen with "new ears" we always will hear something different from what we expect and away from the personal agendas we so carefully employ. That's why Jesus uses hyperbole: to help the disciples hear the gospel of God's love in different ways, through different experiences, with different language and images. If the Bible is a closed word and merely an answer book, then we're in deep trouble. We'll continue to use scripture to attack others and thus perpetuate violence against one another and justify such harm in God's name. In this, we will limit God. & that's not an exaggeration.

Jesus could have used his power to tell the disciples exactly what he thought of their question, but he chose to listen, to open up conversation and to teach. The Bible invites us to enter into an ongoing conversation of Christians who struggle with what it means to live faithfully in relationship and to look beyond ourselves.

Jesus' exaggeration in this text goes beyond what the disciples can comprehend and what we can comprehend: it goes beyond the tokenism of inclusiveness to a radical inclusivity where we take the other seriously, listen to the other, and dare trust that he or she belongs in God's love as much as we do.

So I repeat my challenge of last Sunday (with the assistance of Romans 13) that we, as a Church family and individually, will strive to seek the will of God in all we do, in order that we might love our neighbor as ourselves. For love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Today, we need to be reminded of the progression of Stewardship by faith.

~The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

~Understanding that all is God's, I develop feelings of thanksgiving and praise in my heart- an attitude of gratitude- for all of God's abundant generosity.

~If I understand and live faithfully the first two then I progress to an understanding of the necessity to be a caretaker of everything on the earth.

~And, finally, I am compelled to be generous in my offerings to God- in witness, prayers, presence, and financial gifts- as I give the first and best to God. That is exactly what God did for us in Jesus Christ. And I can hear God say, "P.S., I love you!"

Sources:

Max Lucado, *Walking with the Savior*, freely adapted)

*A Careful Read (Matt. 18:15-20)* by Deanna Langle, freely adapted