

Faith Life Weekly

IS THE CROSS DANGEROUS?

“Am I leading a rebellion,” said Jesus, “that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled.” Then everyone deserted him and fled. (Mark 14:48-50)

This afternoon, I heard an interesting news story on the local Christian station. A couple of high school students were recently suspended for breaking a rule that forbids any “gang symbols” to be worn. The symbol that merited a suspension for the young men was a crucifix. Obviously, the suspension is being questioned because the crucifixes could have been worn for religious reasons. According to the reporting I heard, local clergy in that community know of no gangs that use the crucifix as a symbol, but local police say otherwise.

I bring this up because it got me thinking – is the cross an object that threatens and troubles others in this world? Should it be? There was a recent article in *“The Lutheran”* magazine which put forth the position that Jesus died not only as an atoning sacrifice for our sins, but also because his message was a subversive one that for many reasons was viewed as a threat to the Jewish and Roman way of life. His teachings would have ultimately compromised the economy of Jerusalem, undone the cultural traditions and taboos of the people, and stood in absolute opposition to the authorities in Rome, all without so much as hitting another person in the face. When we look to the cross or speak of it as a reminder of Christ’s mission in this world and our sharing in those things, it carries a tremendous amount of meaning. When we understand the cross as a continuation of the work of Christ on this earth, it brings a radically different message than the standard was of living and surviving that we’re accustomed to.

As for the young men at that school – I hope that they’re reinstated soon and can go back to living out their faith. But I wish that we weren’t so quick to speak of the cross as if it were a harmless symbol of faith. Though not in the way that is suggested by the above story, I think we need to claim as Christians a radical, subversive purpose and meaning to the cross. I think it’s about time that it be talked about as more than just a religious object, but also a transforming one.

P.B.