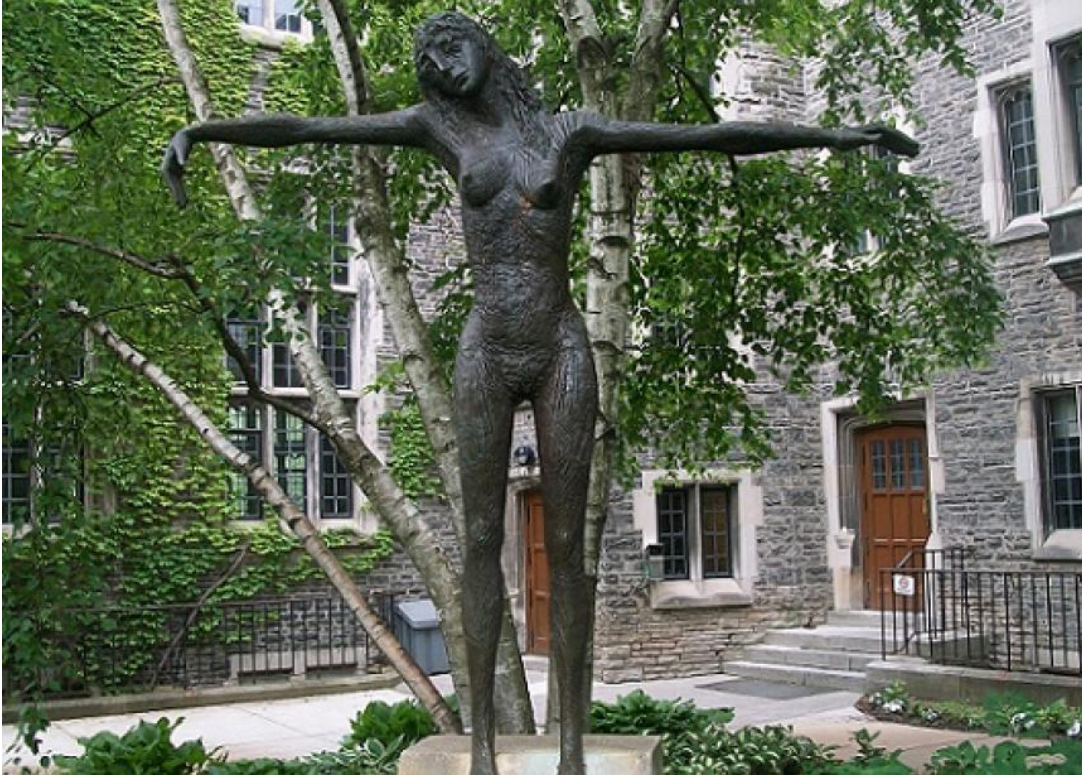


Reflection for Palm/Passion Sunday 2024 - Crosses
Rev. Steve Clifton Rideau Park United Church Ottawa, ON



In 1979, Emmanuel College, the United Church seminary at the University of Toronto, placed the pictured cross on their grounds.

Crucified Woman depicted a naked female figure in a cruciform position, and many were offended by the piece.

According to theologians Doris Jean Dyke and Julie Clague, artist Almut Lutkenhaus-Lackey sculpted “Crucified Woman” simply as an expression of women’s suffering. It was only reluctantly that she lent the sculpture to a United Church in Toronto for Easter one year, unsure of whether she wanted it interpreted theologically. She was overwhelmed by the response, especially the responses of women who for the first time, saw “their suffering, their dying and their resurrection embodied in a woman’s body,” and thereby felt God’s solidarity with the suffering that is specific to women.

Of course, not everyone interpreted the sculpture this way. Some saw it as heretical, too distant from the male body of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Others saw it as too sexual, as it depicts a nude female form.

But the responses of many women, including many survivors of sexual and physical abuse, told a different story. For instance, in 1989, upon hearing of the Montreal Massacre of fourteen women engineering students at the Ecole Polytechnique, hundreds gathered around the “Crucified Woman” to remember the victims and - for some - God’s solidarity with them.

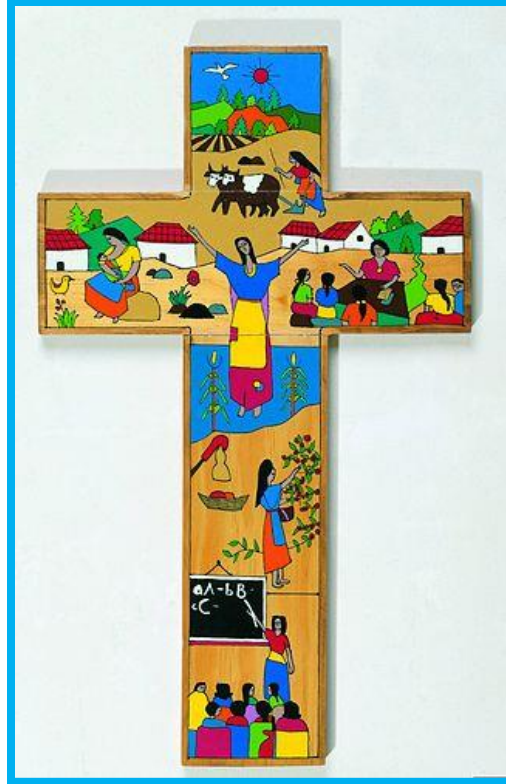


In our time and place the cross is a common image of faith. Crosses were not always the central symbol of the Jesus tradition. This cross, the Guro crucifix, was hung in the Cathedral of Cologne in what is now Germany around the year 960- and it was ground breaking. Just as the crucified woman stirred up reactions when it appeared in 1979, so the Cologne cross was shocking to people in its time.

This public image of a suffering Christ astonished the Western Christian world because it was the first crucifix centrally displayed in a public worship space; crosses were for personal use. Other images were used in churches

And this cross carries the image of a dead Saviour - the first such depiction in the west. The crucified Christ is stripped, flogged, and bloated, with slumped head, lifeless body, and closed eyes. Jesus was not depicted as vulnerable and disfigured before this. Jesus was always before depicted as living and often as triumphant.

This cross with a crucified Christ was ground-breaking. It spoke to common people of God’s solidarity with them, that God in Christ is with us in all things, no matter how dark it gets, even in death....



In Central America there is a folk art tradition that adorns crosses with bright colors; these Crosses of Hope depict the things that are part of people's everyday lives: sun and cloud, land and plants, villages and family, animals and crops, children at play and adults at work... They show that Christ is present with ordinary people in the everyday of their lives. They are also a depiction of all that is blessed in their lives.

This particular Salvadoran cross is also a reminder of the life of a person in whom people saw Jesus-Maria Gomez a Salvadoran teacher, murdered in the Salvadoran civil war. Her life is captured in the art of this cross



In the Celtic lands of Ireland, Scotland and Wales there are crosses called High Crosses. They were constructed as boundary markers or to mark a holy or consecrated place. They were gathering places and sites for ceremony and communal celebration. They were also created to tell the story of the faith. Carved into these crosses, is the story of salvation, from Genesis to the end of time. Adam and Eve, Cain and Able, Moses and the Exodus, the birth of Jesus, the visit of the Magi, Christs miracles and his calling of disciples, the event s of Holy Week, the final Judgement of Matthew 25... all these stories are told in stone.

We modern people have a tendency to separate the cross and the events of Holy Week from the whole salvation story. But our foremothers and forefathers in faith saw the cross as part of the whole salvation story. Jesus birth, life, actions, teachings, death and resurrection - are all one story to be seen together. The sacrifice of our Saviour and our salvation is found in the whole Gospel story, in the whole Biblical narrative.



In Jerusalem`s Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the traditional site of the crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus, a wall near the traditional place of Golgotha is marked with crosses. Centuries of pilgrims marked their visit to the place of the cross by making the sign of the cross in stone.

This week we are pilgrims, moving through Holy Week with Jesus towards the cross.

When you think of a cross, what comes to mind? What kind of cross will you envision in the days to come as we move through Holy Week with Jesus?

In the words of the mystic Teresa of Avila "Let us look to the cross and be filled with peace, knowing that Christ has walked this road and walks it now with us and with all our brothers and sisters."

Amen