

The cross.**Everywhere you look in Christianity you encounter it.**

Everywhere you look in the church, you see it.

Or maybe you don't. Maybe you have seen it so often, that you have stopped seeing it, like the cross in the upper left hand corner of this page. Or on the cover of the bulletin and hymnals. Or even hanging over the altar in the sanctuary.

And maybe you have stopped seeing it, stopped understanding it, in your faith as well. As central as it is, do you know what it means?

...as I was walking between the living room and dining room one day I discovered that I had lost the meaning of the crucifixion. I don't mean that I didn't know what Christians said about the cross...I knew that. I don't mean that I had lost my faith. It was much stranger than that, something more like what I would imagine a stroke victim experiences when she looks at a familiar object like a book or a dinner plate in an ordinary setting, and can't understand what she is seeing. On that day I looked at the cross and it made no sense.

Roberta Bondi, Memories of God

Perhaps you have experienced this disorientation Roberta Bondi describes. Perhaps one day you heard someone say, "Jesus died for my sins," and you asked, "Why? Why did that have to happen?" Or perhaps you read, "For God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son..." and asked, "What Father would ask this of his child?" Or perhaps you sang, "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins; and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains," and thought to yourself, "How on earth does that work?"

If so, you are not alone. Jerry and I have asked these questions. In all likelihood, the person who sits next to you on Sunday has asked these questions. And for certain, the first followers of Jesus asked these questions. The cross stood there, right in the middle of the path to following. They had to make sense of it, or turn back. How to understand?

A favorite Lenten hymn of mine is "O Sacred Head", the last verse of which asks: "What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend, for this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?" This is what the earliest Christians did - they borrowed language from their faith, the words and images they knew best as Jews, and used it to talk about the cross. The cross. It is central. We want to help you make sense of it, so that it doesn't get in the way of your following Jesus. Come to worship this Lenten season, and we will look at all this borrowed language, trying to find what lies at its heart.