



would to God that we could persuade all men to suffer his cross:
a response to mormonism's belittling of the cross
Jacob 1.⁸

Wherefore, we would to God that we could persuade all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger, but that all men would believe in Christ, and view his death, and suffer his cross and bear the shame of the world...

i Introduction

The natives are at it again. Restless. Insecure. Feeling feisty. Attacking the cross of Christ.

This recurrent Mormon anti-cross business is an embarrassment. It is obnoxious as hell. Pure theological buffoonery. Doctrinal malpractice. Indicative of the continuing Mormon insecurity and paranoia. Far beneath us. If it only reflected upon our own poor, insecure character, it might be worth little more than a sad shake of the head and dismissive chuckle. But it demeans the character of Jesus—him who the Book of Mormon introduces as “the ETERNAL GOD,” and proclaims throughout as “God, Himself.”

It is simply impossible—impossible, I say—to imagine that the image and experience of the cross is not indelibly imprinted in Jesus' divine memory. It is certainly imprinted in his hands. It is impossible to believe that Jesus does not think of the cross and his experience on it every moment of his eternal existence. It is impossible to imagine that any event from his earthly ministry, filled with extraordinary events as it was, holds a more special, singular, and distinctive place in his heart and mind. It is easy to imagine that if he periodically returns to earth to reminisce upon a life well lived, that hill once

topped by a rugged cross is at the top of his itinerary. Finally, it is impossible to imagine that he would be anything but pleased with those who are like minded—pleased, I say, with those who remember, cherish, and celebrate the cross and the bravery, fidelity, love, revelation, and much more that is found there.

So, this belittling of the cross is an affront to the Son of Man, his divine character with its perfect memory, and his holy feelings. Since he is not here to directly affirm his thoughts and feelings about the cross and his crucifixion, we can only do the next best thing. We can catalogue and examine what he has caused to be written in his revealed word—words, he says, which “are not of men nor of man, but of me... for it is my voice which speaketh them... wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words.”¹ These words, scripture claims, not only reflect divine thoughts but divine feelings as well, as the words come from the very “bosom” of God.²

In this homily, we will explore what the cross is and what it is not. We will explore what it represents and signifies and what it does not. After the brief survey and arguments found in this homily in which we explore what the cross is and is not, the reader will have to decide what to make of the periodic howl of the lone wolves who would demean the image that represents one of the universe’s most singular and important events and pulls at the holy feelings of a loving and self-sacrificing God.

Stupid justifications of the undiscerning and foolish

dead or alive

I don’t know how many times I’ve heard it said: “We worship a living Christ rather than the dead Christ.” This, as justification and defense for the LDS belittling of the cross, its remembrance, and its iconography. This evidences so much and so many misunderstandings one hardly knows where to begin. But, one must start somewhere, so we will start with this.

¹ See, DC 18.³⁴⁻³⁶

² See DC 35.²⁰

“You do know, right, that Jesus spent three hours on the cross *before* he died? So, the cross is not only about death. It isn’t a simple remembrance of God’s death. It is about life and how to live life to its fullest. It is about the sort of life that God lived and lives.”

Indeed, we know far less about what happened to Jesus on the cross after he died than what happened to him while he lived on the cross. The cross, then, is not merely the place he died. It is the place he suffered before death overtook him. For 180 minutes. Over ten thousand excruciating seconds. So, the assertion that the cross is simply a symbol of death is just that: an assertion. An unfounded and false assertion built on little more than prejudice and small mindedness.

The cross is every bit as much a symbol and remembrance of his suffering as it is of his death. Will they belittle his suffering too, those petty ones of darkened mind? Knowing another target of Mormonism’s belittling insecurity—the Bible—I will pass over all the remembrances found there of Jesus suffering and move right on to the Book of Mormon—a Book many claim to be the most correct of all books. It is full of predictions, remembrances, and celebrations of his suffering that led to his death.

Let the reader conduct their own survey of the Book. They will indeed find that the Book’s prophets, both before and after Christ’s coming, “did testify boldly of his death and suffering” right alongside his resurrection.³ “There could be no redemption for mankind save it were through the death and sufferings of Christ,”⁴ said Alma the Younger. While writing that “the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance,” the same author concluded with, “this is the testimony which is in me.”⁵ Indeed, right along with Christ’s resurrection, Mormon found Christ’s suffering worthy of constant remembrance for the strength and hope that it bestowed upon the soul.

³ 3 Nephi 6.²⁰

⁴ Alma 21.⁹

⁵ Alma 7.¹³

“My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever.”⁶

Clearly, all sincere appreciations, remembrances, and celebrations of Jesus’s sufferings and death are more than appropriate. They are vital.

Before passing on to the next stupid justification for belittling the cross, we should note that this idea of not focusing on the dying and dead Christ flies in the face of the ritual most oft repeated in the life of a Latter-day Saint. In this sacramental ritual, not only are things done “in remembrance of the body of thy Son” and “in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them,”⁷ but the death is reenacted week after week after week, even as Paul teaches,

“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.”⁸

So, yes, we do remember his death. Every. Single. Week. We celebrate it. We reenact it. Over. And. Over. Again.⁹

garden verses cross

I can hear it now. Here comes another stupid justification for belittling the cross, its remembrance, celebration, and iconography. I’ve heard it dozens of times before. It goes something like this:

⁶ Mormon 9.²⁵

⁷ DC 20.^{77, 79}

⁸ 1 Corinthians 11.²⁶

⁹ We will not even explore the LDS endowment where, if one knows what to look for, the cross in its various forms is ubiquitous, found in nearly every sign and token.

“Oh, we do remember and celebrate Jesus’ suffering. But you do know, don’t you, that the greater suffering took place in the garden of Gethsemane.”

“No, I do not know that. And neither do you. It is simply another assertion for which there is not a shred of evidence.”

Let’s just imagine for a second that this unfounded assertion had even a modicum of reality to it. Let’s turn to the Book of Mormon again and imagine what we might find there (For those with a healthy respect for the Bible, I promise that I will get to its message of the cross. But we have to start with where people are, and many Mormons disrespect the Bible, while giving the Book of Mormon every benefit of the doubt).

Let’s imagine, to begin, the visions that Nephi had as he sought to understand the meaning of his father’s dream. We can structure Nephi’s visions into fourteen visions¹⁰ all but the first being introduced with the spirit directed, “Look!” The second through the ninth visions are focused on the meaning of the tree that his father saw. The focus on Jesus and the salient aspects of his earthly ministry—his birth, his ministry, his suffering, his rejection, and his death—demonstrates that the tree is a representation of Jesus and, perhaps, the cross. For Jesus, according to Peter, was “hanged on a tree.”¹¹

In Nephi’s ninth vision, we read,

“Look! And I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record. And I, Nephi, saw that he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.”¹²

If the real suffering and redemptive work was performed in the garden, why is there no

¹⁰ As I understand them, the 14 visions of varying lengths, are: 11.¹⁻⁷; 11.⁸⁻¹¹; 11.¹²⁻¹⁸; 11.¹⁹⁻²³; 11.²⁴⁻²⁵; 11.²⁶⁻²⁹; 11.³⁰; 11.³¹; 11.³²⁻³⁶; 12.¹⁻¹⁰; 12.¹¹⁻²³; 13.^{1-14.8}; 14.⁹⁻¹⁷; 14.¹⁸⁻³⁰

¹¹ Acts 10.³⁹

¹² 1 Nephi 11.³²⁻³³

mention of the garden? Anywhere, in the Book of Mormon? Why do we not read, here, “And I, Nephi, saw that he *suffered in the garden* for the sins of the world.” Why do we not read,

“And my Father sent me that I might *suffer in the garden*; and after that I had *suffered in the garden*, that I might draw all men unto me...” instead of “And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me...”¹³

The brother of Jared foresaw the coming of Christ. However, he was forbidden to reveal parts of his intuition. Though he wrote down what he saw, “they were forbidden to come unto the children of men until after that he should be lifted up upon the cross.”¹⁴ Why not “until after that he should *suffer in the garden*”? Why not, indeed, “until after he should come to earth”? For the fact is, the text’s “until after he should be lifted up upon the cross” seems to function here as “until after he should come to earth” as if his crucifixion encapsulates his entire life and ministry. Paul sees the cross in this way as well. But that will have to wait.

In the Book of Mormon’s version of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Jesus counsels, as he did in the New Testament Gospels, “For it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye will take up your cross, than that ye should be cast into hell.”¹⁵ Why not, “For it is better that ye should deny yourselves of these things, wherein ye *suffer your own garden*, than that ye should be cast into hell”? In fact, it is they “who have believed in the Holy One of Israel” and “have endured the crosses of the world [not the gardens of the world], and despised the shame of it,” who will “inherit the kingdom of God.”¹⁶

When Jesus visited those who survived the storms accompanying his death, he invited all to “come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may

¹³ 3 Nephi 27.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ether 4.¹

¹⁵ 3 Nephi 12.³⁰

¹⁶ 2 Nephi 9.¹⁸

feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world.”¹⁷ He did not reveal his garden suffering, as I assume he could have done in spectacular 3D technicolor, and ask that they contemplate that.

Finally, we will reference the passage that heads this homily and served, in part, as its inspiration. Here, among Jacob’s numerous admonitions is this one: “View his death.” Not, “view his suffering in Gethsemane.”

We could keep going. But you get the point. In speaking of Jesus’ suffering and the work of atonement in which he was engaged during his ministry, the Book of Mormon always makes reference to his crucifixion and death. There is no reference to his experience in the garden of Gethsemane.¹⁸ This choice is not about marketing—the cross being more visual than a garden. The cross and Jesus’ crucifixion and death are absolutely central to the Gospel message. Indeed, “the cross” is as perfect a substitution, as perfect an image, as perfect an icon as any for “the gospel.”

In this section of our homily, we have observed that the Book of Mormon is very much attuned to Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross. The cross, rather than the garden of Gethsemane is the imagery the Book of Mormon uses to highlight Jesus’ suffering and atoning work. His suffering and death on the cross are spoken of over and over again as the means whereby salvation comes to humankind. and as the example of divine self-sacrifice we are to follow.

The cross is not, then, merely or even primarily a symbol for a dying God. It is also a symbol for a suffering God. It is a symbol for a self-sacrificing God. But it is more than this. We now turn our attention to the Christian Bible to see what it has to say about the cross so often and unjustifiably belittled in Mormondom. After this brief survey, we should be able to explicate what the cross IS and what it symbolizes to those who are

¹⁷ 3 Nephi 11.¹⁴

¹⁸ Some have maintained that any and all references to Jesus “bleeding from every pore” is a reference to his experience in the garden. As if he did not bleed on the cross! Again, this is simply assertion without basis.

wise and have hope of a happier, more enduring life.

inspired iconography

We suggested toward the end of the previous section that the cross is as perfectly appropriate a substitution, image, and icon as any for “gospel.” If this wasn’t clear enough in the Book of Mormon, the Christian Bible makes it explicit. Speaking of the cross, Paul declares,

“For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”¹⁹

We should repeat that. “The preaching of the cross... is the power of God.” Paul is concerned about “the cross of Christ” coming to nothing and losing its power—something like what has happened in Mormondom, perhaps. In fact, for believers “the cross” is the very “power of God.” Paul also spoke of the “power of God” in his letter to the Romans.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...”²⁰

“The *preaching of the cross* is the power of God.” The *gospel of Christ*... is the power of God. The preaching of the cross and the preaching of the gospel are, in Paul’s mind, one and the same. The cross equals the gospel. It is the best news ever. One cannot preach the gospel without the cross. One cannot *possess* the gospel without the cross.

It really could not be plainer. Little wonder, then, that Paul “determined not to know any

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 1.¹⁷⁻¹⁹

²⁰ Romans 1.¹⁶

thing among you, *save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*”²¹ “God forbid,” he said on another occasion, “that I should glory, *save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*”²²

Paul knew, I suppose, of Jesus’ experience in the garden. He for sure knew of his resurrection. Yet, Paul could accept ignorance of them before allowing ignorance of “Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” There is much about Jesus about which one could glory—his resurrection, surely—but Paul was determined to glory in nothing “save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We all wish to be at peace with God. We wish to be reconciled to Him. We want Him to think well of us. Well, that peace and reconciliation and good thought is found in “the blood of the cross”—again, not the blood of the garden.

“And, having *made peace through the blood of his cross*, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”²³

Would Mormons like to be at peace with God and have Him think well of them? Then let them be more appreciative, respectful, and understanding of what the cross means to Him and his Son.

Not only does the cross reconcile human beings to their God, it reconciles human beings to each other.

“And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body *by the cross*, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.”²⁴

²¹ 1 Corinthians 2.²

²² Galatians 6.¹⁴

²³ Colossians 1.²⁰

²⁴ Ephesians 2.¹⁶⁻¹⁷

The cross, then, is a symbol of human reconciliation. Would Mormons like to see a world with less enmity and more peace amongst its inhabitants? Then let them be more appreciative, respectful, understanding, and attentive to what the cross means to Him and his Son.

Would Mormons like to be more like Jesus? They say they would. Then let them be more appreciative, respectful, understanding, and attentive to what the cross means to Him and his Son.

“And he said to them all, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.’”²⁵

“And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.”²⁶

We have spent a good bit of space in talking about what the cross is NOT. The cross is not simply a sign, remembrance, celebration, or icon of death. It is not simply a sign, remembrance, celebration, or icon of suffering. So, we can now turn our attention to what the cross IS. The hints have been sprinkled among the passages we have surveyed and so we will return to some of them. What we will find in our study, I testify, is that the cross is a sign, remembrance, celebration, icon, and revelation about LIFE; about life well lived after a godly sort.

What the cross is

During his lifetime, Jacob, the better known of Nephi’s two younger brothers and successor to Nephi’s record keeping ways, “labored diligently” with others in the work of persuasion. In Jacob 1.⁷, Jacob tells us of his labor in persuading his people

“to come unto Christ and partake of the goodness of God, that they might enter into his rest, lest by any means he should swear in his wrath they should not enter in, as in

²⁵ Luke 9.²³

²⁶ Matthew 10.³⁸

the provocation in the days of temptation while the children of Israel were in the wilderness.”

In our homily’s titular passage, Jacob returns to the theme of provoking God. He hopes to not only persuade his own people but “all men not to rebel against God, to provoke him to anger.” Jacob’s following conjoining, “but,” informs us what the opposite of rebellion against God looks like and thus how to avoid God’s anger or wrath. Put more positively, the conjunction informs us of the nature of fealty to God. Fealty to God entails believing “in Christ.” While Jacob’s list is certainly not all encompassing, he lists three ways we witness our belief in Christ. We demonstrate our belief in Christ when we 1) “view his death,” 2) “suffer his cross,” and 3) “bear the shame of the world.” These three things constitute Jacob’s thoughts on what fealty to God is.

It is perhaps too obvious to say that, here, belief in Christ is bound up with the death and shame he suffered on the cross. So much for belittling the cross of Christ. We are to view his death. His death and remembrance of it are to be central and permanent pillars upon which our faith in Christ is evident and expressed.

Then too, we are to “suffer his cross.” So much for the cross being simply a sign of a dying and a dead God. Here, the cross becomes a sign for a way of LIFE. It is a symbol for how disciples live. Disciples of Christ live doing what Jesus did in living, suffering, and dying on the cross. And what Jesus did in living, suffering, and dying on the cross is what he had done throughout his earthly life. From the time of his birth and throughout his ministry, Jesus bore “the shame of the world.” Jesus bore the shame of the world because he rejected and resisted in every moment in all things the world’s wicked and dehumanizing values—values nearly always upheld through violence. Jesus’ disciples are to live the same life of rejection of and resistance to the world’s value system so inimical to an enduring and progressive life.

There is so very much here, so very much in the sign of the cross that it is difficult to know where to begin. But, as before, we must start somewhere, so we will start with the obvious.

Obviously, the cross is an ultimate sign of violence. In suffering the violence of the cross, Jesus exposed the wickedness and injustice of the world's near constant resort to violence. In suffering his cross, Jesus also resisted the world's belief in and use of violent force to achieve one's ends. One of the world's values is to win at any cost. If and when all else fails, this drive to win often—more probably, nearly always—entails the use of force and violence. Jesus announced his rejection of violent force the evening before his crucifixion. When the cowardly mob came to arrest him, and his own disciples appealed to him to resist arrest through forceful violence, Jesus refused.

“Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”²⁷

Jesus was true to his word the following day. He did not yield to the worldly temptation of violent force even in the defense of his own life. He would not use it to further his ends, no matter how right and glorious his ends might be. The cross, then, is a sign of the wickedness of violence and of Jesus' rejection and resistance to violence. It is impossible to overestimate just how badly the world needs this sermon preached though the sign of the cross.

But the cross is not only a sign of *Jesus'* rejection of violence. The cross is a sign to be picked up and born by Jesus' disciples. It is a sign of their discipleship in following his example in rejecting and resisting the world's lie that violence is inevitable, enlivening, and enduring.

Related to the rejection of violence is the bearing of “the shame of the world.” The world is ashamed and scandalized, of course, by those who will not pick up the sword and use violence to further ends—their own or the group's—deemed to be “holy. The cross, then, is a sign of Jesus' and our own willingness to endure shame rather than yield to the world's violent values. But bearing the shame of the world runs further and deeper than

²⁷ Matthew 26.⁵²⁻⁵³

the rejection of violence.

When we think of the shame Jesus suffered on the cross, we again think first of the obvious. We think of the physical shame of hanging on the cross. We think of the shame of having his body exposed, everyone looking upon his nakedness as he lost control of his body and all bodily functions. We think too on the emotional shame of being thought of as defeated, exposed as a fraud and failure.

“He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him...”²⁸

Think of the shame in being rejected by society and considered a criminal, disloyal to whatever the world has whimsically determined to be of value. Now, we like to say that Jesus was without sin. And so he was. But, throughout his life, Jesus was guilty of resisting and violating worldly principles and values. This made him a criminal in the eyes of the world. In crucifying Jesus, the world displayed in the most certain terms possible what its values were. It also displayed how deeply ashamed of Jesus it was. It was ashamed of the way he had always resisted its “charms.” He had stood up, for example, for segments of society that were deemed shameful: the poor, the publican, the leper, the female, the blind, the deaf, the lame, the possessed, and, yes, the sinner. The world found vulnerability shameful. But Jesus embraced it. By embracing it, he transformed it. This, of course, is consistent with the intuition of his own mother, Mary.

“He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
and exalted them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things;
and the rich he hath sent empty away.”²⁹

We might think of the opposite of shame as pride. We know what the world take’s pride

²⁸ Matthew 27.⁴²⁻⁴³

²⁹ Luke 1.⁵²⁻⁵³

in. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Book of Mormon where the world is depicted as a great and spacious building. The world's pride is wealth and power and prestige. In other words, the world's shame is poverty and vulnerability and commonness. The world shames those who resist its perverted value system devoted to wealth, power, and prestige. The world takes pride in the acquisition of such by any means necessary—means that are most often disrespectful and demeaning to the value of the individual and violent toward the individual's wellbeing.

Jesus lived resisting the wicked, violent, and destructive values of this world. Violence, yes. But also the wicked propaganda concerning wealth, power, and prestige. For his resistance, Jesus suffered the cross and bore “the shame of the world.” The cross is a sign of Jesus' faithfulness in bearing the shame of the world; in rejecting and resisting all that the world takes pride in. The cross is, then, as we have said repeatedly, a sign that signifies life as much as it does death. The cross is less about how Jesus died and more about how he lived.

But, further, the cross signifies the life to which any and every disciple of Jesus is called. This life is the same life Jesus lived. It is a life of resistance to and rejection of the world's perverted values in which it takes pride. It is a life of resistance and rejection, knowing full well that this resistance and rejection will bring the world's shame.

The apostle Paul speaks of the cross in near identical terms. In relation to Jesus' cross, Paul admonishes his readers to look “unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him *endured the cross, despising the shame*, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”³⁰

Jesus, then, rejected the shame the world heaped upon him knowing that what the world considered shame was in fact victory. Paul also made the same leap as Jacob, asserting that the cross was a sign not only of Jesus' resistance but of the disciple's.

³⁰ Hebrews 12.²

“The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”³¹

So, the cross IS a flashing neon sign concerning the world’s corruption and a sign of our call to resist the world’s corruption—a corruption displayed through wealth, power, prestige, and the violence it so often uses to acquire and maintain them. One can’t say enough about how important this signal is.

It is, perhaps, largely due to this resistance that individuals become one. Become reconciled. We have already seen that this “at-one-ment” between previously irreconciled humans is one of the cross’ purposes and meanings.

“And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body *by the cross*, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.”³²

It goes almost without saying, finally, that the cross is a sign of Jesus’ love. It is a sign of Jesus’ selfless love. It is a sign of Jesus’ selfless love that accepts and embraces.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”³³

“And again, I remember that thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world, that thou mightest take it again to prepare a place for the children of men. And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity...”³⁴

³¹ Galatians 6.¹⁴

³² Ephesians 2.¹⁶⁻¹⁷

³³ John 3.¹⁴⁻¹⁷

³⁴ Ether 12.³³⁻³⁴

But, again, the cross and Jesus' death on it is more than a sign of the life he lived. It is a sign of discipleship and of the life that every self-confessing follower of Jesus must live.

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”³⁵

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, *as I have loved you*. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”³⁶

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.’”³⁷

Some years ago, a woman came to my office to ask me questions about my faith. I noticed that she wore an attractive cross around her neck. At one point in our conversation, I asked her why she wore a cross. What it meant to her. Without the slightest hesitation, she replied, “This cross reminds me of the sacrifice Jesus made for me and that I am to sacrifice myself in service to others.” It seems she was far more discerning and wiser than so many Mormons who seemingly can't or won't see beyond the blood and gore of the cross.

Too bad. Shameful, really. Ignorant.

Conclusion

In this homily, we have attempted to explore the meaning of the cross: what it is and what it is not. We have only scratched the surface; for something as glorious as the cross of Jesus is too big for any one or even series of homilies.

³⁵ 1 John 3.¹⁶

³⁶ John 15.¹²⁻¹³

³⁷ Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁵

But we have sought to do this much. We have sought to demonstrate that the cross is not simply or only a sign of suffering and death. Rather, it is much the opposite. It is a sign of life. It is a sign of the life Jesus lived during his earthly ministry and now during his eternal ministry at the right hand of God. It is, moreover, a sign of the life that those who would be his disciples must live. And what kind of life was it that Jesus lived and that we must live. Among other things, the cross is a sign of a life lived in rejection of and resistance to the world and its depraved values—values Jesus exposes on the cross. The cross is a sign of a life of reconciliation—reconciliation between God and mortals, surely, but also of reconciliation between mortals. The cross is a sign of a life of love and self-giving.

There is nothing trivial or foolish about the cross, its remembrance, its celebration, or its iconography. What is foolish is any thought to the contrary. As Paul warned and then promised, “the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”³⁸

It is unimaginable that utilizing the cross as a remembrance and sign of such a dignified and godly life is offensive to God. To think otherwise, it seems, requires a particularly callous and darkened mind. Indeed, the mind enlightened by divine principles finds that the cross draws it. The cross draws the mind to Christ, and it draws the mind to imagine a far better way of life.

“Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me...”³⁹

Jesus is still wearing the tokens of the cross in his hands and in his feet. He does not forget the cross. He does not mean for us to forget it. So it is that Jesus has on more than

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 1.¹⁸

³⁹ 3 Nephi 27.¹³⁻¹⁴

one occasion drawn me to him. On more than one occasion he has drawn me to the foot of the cross. On more than one occasion he has drawn me to look upon the prints in his hands and feet. I have, in such moments wept for him, of course. But, though it challenges me severely, I have also wept for the joy and potential of the blessed life into which he has called me through that old rugged cross.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!