

May 4, 2023

LOOK FOR GOD'S POWER IN A CROSS CHECK

Hockey fever has hit our house. Both my husband and I have contracted it, and have an official Carolina Hurricanes twirly towel and team jerseys to prove it. When the National Hockey League season playoffs started last month, our son even flew here to whisk his father off to Raleigh to Game 1 as an early birthday surprise. Whether the Canes advance through further playoff rounds or not, it is a fun time for fans.

But even having grown up in hockey-crazed Minnesota, I still have a lot to learn about the rules. For instance, I knew that a crosscheck resulted in a penalty, but what exactly is it? Picture an aggressive chop against the opponent, using the shaft of the hockey stick with both hands.

Having learned that, I now chuckle when the pilot asks the flight attendants to perform a crosscheck prior to takeoff and landing -- that's about checking the doors, not chopping your passengers! But as the plane gains speed for takeoff or descends for landing, I do my own kind of cross check.

I look at the cross in my ring, and check my soul for the conviction that no aviation mishap -- or anything else -- can separate me from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). I am not a nervous flyer, but many others are, so for their sakes it is a good time to exude the peace of the unshakable future Christ secured on the cross for all who believe in Him (John 6:40).

The cross, through the kind of total transformation that is God's specialty, went from being the epitome of disgrace and odious death

to the symbol of love and eternal life. Yet, the redemptive story of Jesus' crucifixion is still a stumbling block to many people today, just as it was in the early days of the church.

How could the true God ever die in such a shameful, painful way? And why would He need to do it, let alone choose to do it? The apostle Paul noted this common puzzlement in his letter to the early Christians in Corinth: "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

This season of Eastertide is a good time for believers to perform a personal cross check, to see if the cross of Christ has real meaning and power in our lives. What would that look like?

It would look like a cross-shaped life, reaching upward to God and outward to one another, like the beams of the cross. The cruciform life is self-sacrificial -- a framework that is certainly deemed foolish by many in our self-centered culture. Yet Jesus made this plain: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

Taking up our cross does not mean bearing up with the ordinary difficulties and hardships of life, although those things can be sanctified as we endure them by God's grace. Rather, taking up our cross means publicly identifying with Jesus and shouldering the consequences, ranging from ostracism and ridicule to suffering and death.

It means loving the way Jesus loves, by always willing the good of the other person and being a blessing to them, whether friend or enemy. This unsentimental, intentional, active love is what Paul called "the message of the cross...the power of God."

As we cross check our own lives, we should look for evidence of God's powerful, selfless love in the testimony of our ordinary days. Are we known to follow Jesus? Do we embody his truth and compassion in our words and actions? Are we drawing on the Holy Spirit's power to continue Jesus' redemptive work, in whatever way He calls us to do it? Do our calendars and checkbooks bear this out?

Let's think about this, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power" (1 Corinthians 4:20).

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux