

From this corner

The Offense of the Cross

Larry Baird

Remember Christmas Eve? SRO. Filling our churches was as easy as opening the doors and lighting the candles. Almost everyone wants a piece of it even if in reality they don't take the incarnation of God in Jesus too seriously. Now comes Lent and there is no equivalent crowd. They are absent until Easter. Make no mistake about it. The cross is still offensive, and the meaning of what God was doing in Jesus is even more offensive. That is why it is trendy to remove the cross from modern church buildings to make it palatable to the "unchurched." That is why some modern theologians go through intellectual contortions to avoid reference to any substitutional theory of the atonement. The cross is offensive because it shows there is something humanity cannot fix and the work of Jesus Christ is unique. The thought that Jesus had to die to save us is repugnant to much modern sensibility. For if that is the real key to salvation our self-help models of salvation are shown to be the futile attempts of a self-delusional humanity. I suspect that this is part of the controversy over Mel Gibson's new movie. This stuff is controversial. Any suggestion that more education, good will and tolerance will not solve all of our problems and bring peace on earth will meet with the disgust of the majority in our culture. Suggest that the only road to salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ and you will meet open hostility.

I encourage all of us to struggle with Lent regardless of whether it fills our churches or not. For the effective sharing of the meaning of Jesus' deliberate move to the cross and his death thereon is the key not only to the uniqueness of the Christian faith, but God's offer of salvation to a world still held captive to the ludicrous notion that humanity has within it either the will or ability to save itself.