

8 The Holy Spirit at Work

The materials of cross making are tools for the Holy Spirit to speak to you. You can call them physical symbols or story pieces or whatever you want, but the movement of God will help you put them together. As you assemble the pieces of your cross, don't be surprised if they take you in a direction that is different from what you originally envisioned. That is a really good sign that the Spirit is at work. And don't be surprised if an epiphany moment descends upon you, unexpectedly.

I never know when the epiphany moment in my own cross making will come. Sometimes it appears early, when I've applied the first object to the cross. Sometimes it occurs even earlier, when I'm walking the shoreline and catch sight of the driftwood that so resembles a tree. I immediately know that this driftwood will become The Tree of Life, to represent both the Genesis tree, which offered Adam and Eve the chance to live forever, and the cross of Jesus, which did indeed allow us all to live forever. As I lift the driftwood from the sandy beach, I know that I will make a cross that represents the continuing story of God that began in the Hebrew Bible and has yet

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to end, a cross that most dramatically expresses my own view of the cross as the universal symbol of God.

Whenever in the cross making process my flash of understanding arrives—whether at inception, half-way through, or at the tail end—it is, for me, a moment of recognition, not a moment of decision. I suddenly see what God wants me to see, making me feel as if the cross had been just waiting for me to come along and recognize it into existence. Your epiphany moment may strike you the same way. Such remarkable moments are encouraged when you begin and continue your cross making with God uppermost in your mind. Enter into this spiritual practice, at all times, as if you are praying with your hands. What you choose to put on your crosses, what you choose to say with your crosses, and the ways in which you actually construct your crosses, are all ways of talking to, about, and with God. At the same time, God is talking to you and, through you, to others. Cross making is not just decorating two sticks. It is being with God.

When I am engaged in making crosses, my receptivity to God is intensified. New, vibrant insights well up. These religious thoughts arrive not from rumination, but from work. Physical work. Hands messy, arms straining, tongue-poked-out work.

This receptivity is different from the tendency of my Episcopal Church, which is to interact with God cerebrally. Reason—along with Scripture and Tradition—is a cornerstone of our faith. When we engage in Bible study, we sit on folding chairs in a group, reading, talking, offering up our thoughts. When we follow this format, our primary avenue to understanding God is analytical.

Working with crosses makes me long for more. I want something that does not involve reading, study, endless discussion. I want a physical approach to God. A lady preacher told me this physical type of prayer was called “Kinetic prayer.” When I researched what Kinetic prayer might be, I saw that she was right: I wanted an understanding that does not come from parsing out an explanation for God, but arrives through a sensory, interactive experience of God. I find such an understanding when my fingers are slimy with glue, mashing papyrus onto driftwood, discovering the hatchmarked strands overlaid into a thick and rough and ancient-looking, fibrous paper. I find it in the dips and bumps of gnarly driftwood. I find it in the rusted contours of picked-up bolts and cast-off nails. I find it in God’s world—in all of God’s world.

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What I have found in this world is that when you are working on creating images of God, God is working on you. Not because you are straining so hard to hear what God has to say, but because you are straining so hard to make this dang thing work. The epiphany comes as swift as a winged bird shooting across the open sky. Understanding zings into your brain and you see something unexpected, enlightening, comforting. Working on God enables God to work on you.

Exercise

Assemble all of your collected items. Spread them in front of you. Finger each one. Meditate on what this item means to you, what that item might mean. Let God come close to you in prayer. The crosses can be quite representational, or the pieces can be put together in a decorative way that shouts, "Halleluiah!" Give it a little bit of time. Let the Holy Spirit work with you and the objects.



Exercise

What “physical” ways have you worshiped God—in dance, drawing, making clay objects? How was that experience different for you than traditional cerebral worship? If this is your first experience of engaging in physical spirituality, how does working on your crosses feel different to you? What would you like to get out of such a physical prayer experience?



