There is no way we can adequately explain the cross. We can expound on it, but we have to trust the Holy Spirit to interpret it and apply it to our lives. There are many theories of the atonement, but when you get down to it, they are really no more satisfactory than those classical arguments, which we call, "proofs for the existence of God." When our Lord Himself was dying on the cross, he cried out, "My God, my God, why?" And if there was an element of mystery for Christ Himself, it will remain a mystery for each of us. But though the cross is a mystery, it is definitely not mystical (Unreal, far out or detached). It is not obscure from human experience or irrelevant to daily living. In January 1948 Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated. India was in turmoil. This was shortly after the nation had gained her independence, and it occurred at the very peak of Hindu nationalistic fervor. In those days, people were very cynical towards christianity. Any other faith, outside of Hinduism, was considered a religion of foreigners, colonial imperialists and oppressors. Christianity was winning no popularity contests in India at that time. But an amazing thing happened, within days of the assassination of Gandhi. Every newspaper and magazine in India went out of its way to compare
Gandhi's death with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. They stretched the truth, trying to accomplish this goal. Both were killed on a Friday. They said both had four wounds (Though we know Christ had five wounds - Ghandi was shot four times). Ghandi was killed by a Hindu, which was one of his own (Like Christ, who was killed by His own). Jesus forgave His crucifiers from the cross while He was dying, and Gandhi muttered a few words, which were interpreted as prayers to God. They said, "If Gandhi had been conscious at that point, he would have forgiven his murderers." They stretched every point to compare it to the cross. Why? Because the cross is implanted in the rugged realism of life. The cross touches life at all points. It is a mystery, while at the same time, it is totally relevant. On one hand, it is quite correct to say that we can never understand the cross. It is equally right to think, in spite of our color or culture, that it is the one human event throughout history, that we immediately understand. We may never fathom its mystery, but we feel and identify with its meaning. The cross touches life at all points of felt need, in what we call the "tragic" or "absurd" in human existence. There is nothing unusual about the cross. Thousands died on crosses before and after Christ died. Two
others died on crosses the same day He died. There was nothing mysterious to the people of that day concerning the act of crucifixion. There was nothing unique in the pain or pattern of Christ's cross. The unique aspects of Christ's death were found in the reality of who He was. Also involved in this mystery, was how this act of sacrifice was used in the overall redemptive plan of God, and what Christ has made of it. Today we need to be able to apply the cross to our generation, especially concerning the tragedies of life and human suffering. Just let me throw out a few words, words that are a part of a bewildering ingredient of human existence. Let us start with "blood" and "death." On one hand, we moderns seem to be obsessed with avoiding death. On the other hand, there is a great resurgence concerning our interest in dying, the stages of dying, the meaning of death, life after life (Or after death). Death mainly occupies the minds of our young. You'll see death if you read junior high school poems and school magazines. You'll hear death in much of their music. Though we know that actual suicide rates are high among the young, we might truly say that for some, "suicide is a way of life." During a period of time, one of the favorite places for Swedish youth to go on
their dates was to cemeteries, where they would sit in brooding silent contemplation. **Together with this, there is a horror and fascination with blood and death.** The bloodier the accident, the larger the crowd that gathers. The bloodier the crime, the more attention it receives from the mass media. Our novels, movies and television dramas are filled with blood. Many years ago, the best-selling novel was **Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood."** Why? Because people had not heard the general facts about the cold blooded mass murder in Kansas (Of good Methodist people)? No! Everybody had heard about that. But hundreds of pages in the report had been plowed through, and Capote, in an unemotional news reporting style, cleverly, relentlessly, wove all of the gory details together. **When you finish the book, you wonder who was more cold blooded - the murderers or Truman Capote. Without the shedding of blood there is no excitement or drama. Stephen King once described death as a boring topic, which needed to be infused with more excitement.** Like it or not, there’s something in human nature that responds to all of this in a horrible, morbid sort of way. The Gospel story is a murder mystery. It talks about a bloody crime. Annas and Caiaphas plotted in Herod's palace to
murder Jesus Christ, as carefully and cold bloodedly as two men plotted to kill that family in Kansas (Found in Capote's book). The facts are as human, real and horrible as a modern-day novel. The difference is that the blood in this story is not wasted blood. It's shedding has a permanent effect on the moral universe. In some mysterious way, this blood deals with the problem of human sin. **In this crime lies the conquest of all human crimes, because the victims on Easter day become the victors.** Therefore, there is pardon and power to release all who stand condemned by the broken laws of God and humankind. What is the only answer to the crime situation and prison crisis we are facing? Sociologists wring their hands. Psychologists and psychiatrists have given up in great despair. **Those who proclaim the cross of Christ have the greatest chance at making a dent in this dreadful problem.**

When the former pro football star, Bill Glass, finished his three-day christian crusade in a maximum security prison in Wisconsin, he witnessed the most astounding conversions he had ever seen. The prison psychiatrist told Bill that he had done more for 98 percent of the inmates in three days than he had accomplished in 15 years for 2 percent of the inmates. Why? **Because the message of the cross**
touche the human heart. It is naturally built into our lives. Can you tell me why, in spite of all this, that there are those in our own churches, who claim the name of Jesus Christ, yet make fun of a "slaughter house religion," and will have nothing to do with the blood of Jesus? Life is blood and life is bloody. At the heart of the gospel there is this rugged realism, as vivid as the morning newspaper. The late Dorothy Sayers, who was a remarkable British woman, wrote some of the most fantastic detective novels ever written, and was one of the great theologians of her time. She wrote, "The man we hanged was God Almighty. That's the outline of the official story. It is a tale of the time when God was the underdog and got beaten. When He submitted to the conditions He laid down, and became like a man He had made, and the men He made broke Him and killed Him." She asked, "Is this the dogma we find so dull? Is this the terrifying drama of which God is the victim and hero?" She concluded, "If this is dull, then what in heaven's name is worthy to be called exciting?" Blood, murder and death are common ingredients of human existence. They have happened, and they will take place again. The Bible tells us of the most incredible thing, "That once it happened to God Himself." There is no way
that you and I can fathom the implications of this story, but never let us say that it is remote from life. It can never be said that the cross is irrelevant to our daily living. Another couple of words to be considered are "deceit and injustice." Human nature is so weak and corrupted, that even the best have been betrayed by those whom they have trusted. How unfair and unjust it all is! The psalmist cries out, "My own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who shared his bread with Me, has lifted up his heel against Me." Jesus quoted this in the New Testament, and applied it to Judas (John 13:18). Jeremiah 20:10 says that Jeremiah's familiar friends wished to condemn him (They waited and anticipated his fall). Job laments the fact that his entire family had forsaken him, and they advised him to turn away from his God. Finally he cried out, "All my intimate friends hated me, and those whom I loved have turned against me." We make generous allowances for crimes of ignorance, or the passion of a moment, but even the most hardened are aroused with sympathy and indignation when there is deliberate treachery by those who say they are friends. Jesus was the victim of a plot. He was denied by His disciples. He was betrayed by one of the inner circle, with a kiss, meant to be a symbol of faithful love. Luke 23:24-
25 says, "Pilate gave sentence, that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, whom they asked for; but Jesus, he delivered up to their will." Talk about deceit and injustice! This takes the cake! If we think that life has dealt us (Or our friends) a serious blow, what about Jesus? Even the dying thief on the cross said that Jesus was dying unjustly. **The cross touches life in the areas of rampant injustice.** We may not understand everything about the cross, but one thing we do know, that the terrible injustices which many people are suffering around this weary world can be spoken to by the christian gospel. A believer can tell the world that the heart of his/her message is one of the worst injustices ever to be experienced by humankind. **The denial of Peter, the betrayal of Judas and the treachery of Pilate link the crucifixion (The heart of the gospel) to the problems of human deceit and injustice.** Another word to consider is "disappointment." What a common human experience! Have we ever seen disappointment in the eyes of children, after opening a Christmas package? What about that look in the eyes of a lover whose partner has suddenly and unexpectedly cut off their relationship? When love meets with
rejection? What about the racking moans and cries from those who have been betrayed by one whom they fully trusted? We meet disappointment on every hand. What is so bad about this? An accompanying humiliation is always present when disappointment sweeps over us. Why is life like this? Why do we have to suffer so? Others get what they want, so why can't I? Again, the cross touches life in this whole range of human emotions. Actually it starts long before the cross. It is dealt with in preparation for the cross. Long before Calvary, the Old Testament God is portrayed as the brokenhearted and disappointed God. Isaiah, in his parable, talks about a man who had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He gathered up stones and planted the choicest vines in it. He built a tower, and made a place for a wine press. He hoped that it would bring forth grapes, but it only brought forth wild grapes. He cries out, "Now, O inhabitants of Israel and men of Judah, Judge between me and my vineyard." Listen to this haunting verse of the disappointed God, "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done to it?" Hosea says, "How shall I give you up, O Ephraim? How shall I deliver you, O Israel?" Micah cries out, "O Israel what have I done to you? How have I wearied you?
Tell me what wrong I have done to you." Jeremiah says, "O generation, heed the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness unto you? Why do my people say we are broken loose? We will come no more unto you. Can a maid forget her ornaments nor a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten Me, days without number." **Here is the anguished cry of a disappointed God.**

"What more could have been done to my vineyard?" Jesus takes a lot of these prophecies and places them into His parable in the 12th chapter of Mark, about the vineyard. The only difference in Jesus' version, is that the owner of the vineyard sends his only beloved son to tend the vineyard, and the laborers kill him. In the cross, all of the age long anguish and disappointment in God is consummated. **Here, humankind, in pride and rebellion, has killed God.** The love that God gave, sparing not His only Son, and the love that Jesus gave, sparing not His life was "rejected love."

Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I would have gathered you, but you would not come to Me." **Every effort Jesus made to bring a nation to repentance failed.** The two on the road to Emmaus said, "We had hoped" (Past perfect tense). It is a mystery and only our faith can grasp it. **One thing is for sure, the cross is planted firmly in**
the graveyard of all disappointments. It is real. It is relevant. We can look at the cross the way we look at life. The Lord says, "Look at me! Is there any sorrow that compares to my sorrow?" We naturally respond, "No." Then, let us consider the words "risk and sacrifice." In a way, I don't like these words, but I know that life is filled with these words. One marine pilot told me that planes were switched on him at the last minute with a fellow pilot, at one particular site, and his friend crashed, due to complications. To me, that's cutting it a little close. Social workers in a ghetto, a missionary in a diseased village and even ourselves. We all run a risk in this life, which may at any time empty itself into the term, "sacrifice." The difference in the sacrifice of Christ was that He voluntarily gave His life. “He willingly laid it down." This is real in our world. Christ took the term "sacrifice" and lifted it to its highest possible level. The Lenten season is designed to lift up the cross of Jesus Christ. When Jesus said in John 12:32 that if He was lifted up, He would draw all people to Himself, He was referring to Himself on the cross (This was His glory). One pastor was speaking at a church in Kansas, and shared about the theme of the cross. Following this, during an hour of open discussion, there was a man who stood and had a great deal of
trouble controlling his emotions, as he shared his witness. He had been a friend to this family (Described in Capote's book – “In Cold Blood”), who had been so brutally murdered. He had a hard time dealing with this whole matter. He asked himself why something like that would happen to such a good family. He said, "I felt hard toward God for some time until He convinced me that there were things in my heart that were causing Him great pain. I repented, and asked God to forgive me, and to help me with the attitudes of my heart." The writer of Hebrews speaks to this in 6:6 when he writes that those who commit apostasy (Turning from God after He shares His life with them), have presently crucified the Son of God with the decisions of their own hearts. Diane Sawyer asked Mel Gibson, “So Who killed Jesus Christ?” He replied, “The big answer is, we all did.” Should I say, as the Apostle Paul has already so eloquently said, “We all have the potential to keep on killing Jesus?” How close are we to letting the reality of that rugged cross change our lives? IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.