

Holy burdens

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June 23, 2015

During key points in my life, I am sure that I heard people say, "That's just my cross to bear," but I can't think of any specific instances.

Lately, I started thinking more about the cross of Christ and what it means when Christ warns us of the crosses that will come when we follow him.

I've also come across more than my share of people who take on the long-tortured face of martyrdom—without realizing that their situation really doesn't warrant the overly dramatic sighs, the long telling of sad tales of woe.

I've begun to be uncomfortable with this language of martyrdom, especially in an age where we are seeing more people truly martyred for their faith, as with the various executions committed by ISIS in the past year.

And yet, it also does seem right and just to acknowledge that each of us will be called to serve in ways that will take us to places we would not willingly choose. It's not exactly a martyrdom, not really a true cross.

Recently I came across a phrase in [a blog post](#) by Martha Spong: "holy burden." This phrase seems perfect to me to describe what many of us might have once said was "our cross to bear."

Spong, who is part of a two-minister family, used it this way: "Some days it feels so ordinary to be there in a church-owned house with my wife and our children that the only thing I stress about is whether the puppy will chew on something that belongs to the church rather than to us. Other days, it feels like I finally know what cross I was always intended to bear, a cross engraved with the words 'Queer Christian.' It's not a death sentence; rather it is a holy burden, and the work of my life, to be queer and faithful."

I think of my own holy burdens: being the hospice chaplain periodically at work as we have lots of losses to mourn, of being the one who argues for gentleness in

personnel issues, of being the one who diligently works at the various ministries of reconciliation that a modern college requires—these burdens do not leave me martyred, but they do often leave me drained.

Thinking of it as a holy burden might change my mental state. In some ways, I don't need to change my mental state—I already look at these tasks as my particular ministry.

Jesus never promised us that it would be easy, this business of being the light in the world, the yeast in the bread dough.

But it's so important that we do it.

Originally posted at [Liberation Theology Lutheran](#)