



Gaye Strathearn

The Interview: Good Friday is seen as the most holy day in Christian tradition, yet it is not particularly emphasized in Latter-day Saint dialogue. And outside of Easter lessons, pictures of the crucifixion are rarely displayed. In contrast, depictions of the suffering of Christ on the cross hold prominent positions within most Christian buildings whether local meetinghouses or grand cathedrals.

Dr. Gaye Strathearn grew up Latter-day Saint in a small branch in Australia. She and her fellow members did celebrate Good Friday. When she spent her first Easter on BYU campus, she was surprised that what she had always celebrated as a sacred day was pretty much a non-event. This has always bothered her and has led her to research the topic. In “Christ’s Crucifixion: The Reclamation of the Cross,” she explores the relationship of Latter-day Saint teachings and culture regarding the crucifixion. Strathearn isn’t arguing to put crosses on our buildings or forgetting the seminal event of Gethsemane, but she does think we need to put a bit more of our attention on the instrument of Jesus’ death, the cross.

Some Latter-day Saints may feel uncomfortable with this prospect, which is natural. Even among early Christians, some followers were unsure how to deal with the crucifixion. It was an ugly way to die, and they struggled with the idea that the Son of God would be executed in such a shameful manner. The accounts of Jesus’ Crucifixion in the four Gospels are the most detailed accounts that we have of an ancient crucifixion. But while they describe what happened, only the writings of Paul discuss the why of Christ’s Crucifixion. Paul taught early Christians that the most important things Christ had delivered unto mankind were the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

Strathearn details four reasons why she believes the cross should hold an important place in our private and public discourse, both among ourselves as Latter-day Saints and in conjunction with our Christian friends.

1. The events on the cross are an integral part of the Atonement. Bruce R. McConkie wrote that the suffering begun in Gethsemane was finished on the cross. For the Book of Mormon, the cross is not a marginal footnote to the Atonement. Rather, the phrase “sufferings and death” is at the very heart of important sermons. The Doctrine and Covenants specifically includes Christ’s death in the Atonement equation as well.

2. The scriptural metaphor that we can be “lifted up” because Christ was lifted up on the cross is a symbol of God’s great love for us. When the Savior described his gospel to the Nephites, he did it in terms of the cross.
3. In the New Testament the invitation to take up our cross was the symbol of discipleship. Just as there was a cost to the Atonement, there is a cost to our discipleship.
4. The signs of the Crucifixion were so important for Christ that he kept them even after he received a glorified, resurrected body. When the Savior visited the America’s, he made it a point that all feel the wounds in his hands. He also showed his wounds to his disciples in the Old World.

Listen in as Gaye Strathearn not only shares the historical background of crucifixion but also shows how rooted Latter-day Saint scripture is in the death of Christ on the cross.

About Our Guest: Gaye Strathearn is an associate professor in the Department of Ancient Scripture and in the Ancient Near East Studies program at BYU. She has taught at BYU since 1995, including a year at BYU’s Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies. Dr. Strathearn received her Bachelor of Physiotherapy from the University of Queensland (Australia), a BA and MA in Near Eastern Studies from BYU, and a Ph.D. in Religion (New Testament) from the Claremont Graduate University. Her research centers primarily on New Testament topics, especially those of interest to Latter-day Saints.

Transcript: For a transcript of this podcast (once its available from LDS Perspectives), go to <http://www.ldsperspectives.com/2019/04/10/symbol-cross/>.

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