



The Story of the Cross

One of the signs of a vibrant community is that members share in the joy when one of the others has a success. Last Tuesday, the Men in White celebrated the news that James, now an old man, would soon be released. He started a bible study group many years ago and several of the men have been a part of his group.

I was in James' small Prayer and Share group Tuesday night. He chose to talk about gratitude. He spoke with the conviction that his life has been blessed, ***because he has come to know God.***

I did not know James, so I asked him to tell me a little about his background. His mother became pregnant with him when she was 11 years old, and gave birth to him at age 12. His grandmother and great grandmother were mean to him. His two cousins beat him and abused him in the presence of the adults. No one lifted a finger to stop it. One cousin shot and killed the other. James felt a measure of relief that the abuse would be lessened.

He had a head injury as a child and did not complete the 6th grade until he was 16 years old. He learned to read in prison by reading the bible. Yet, this simple uneducated man spoke with wisdom and understanding about the nature of culpability. His sophistication seemed out of place.

James was raised without any guidance about, or reference to, what was right or wrong. He said it never occurred to him that it was wrong to steal. He had a son who took his own life when the son was released from prison the second time. His other son died of a heart attack shortly after being released from prison. In an oddly detached way, James said that the loss of his two sons, "Hurt a little."

James started weeping when he began to talk about his bible study friends, three of whom were in our small group. It was in this group that he, and the others, found friendship, trust and affection. They helped each other to grow in faith and to come to know God. His gratitude was expressed eloquently with few words and many tears.

My drive home from the unit provides time to unpack the lessons of the Men in White. I could not stop thinking about James' strange life- a 12 year old mother, betrayal by adults, physical pain, and social isolation. Yet, his story was one of joy and victory and the love of God.

It was the story of the cross.