

Pigs, a Postal Worker and a Gigantic Cross

In a day and age where nativity scenes and religious icons are banned from most public spaces, there is something wonderful and refreshing about a gigantic cross built up on a hillside. If you are driving in southern Illinois, you might catch a glimpse of this enormous cross sitting on the top of a mountain. No doubt, you will be struck by its size, but you might not realize how it came to be.

The Bald Knob Cross of Peace rests on top of Mount Baldy. The cross itself stands 111 feet tall, and its arms extend 63 feet wide. For decades, Easter Sunrise services have been held at the cross. The first was held in 1937. Two men are credited with the original idea for the gigantic symbol of faith: Wayman Presley, a rural letter carrier, and a pastor, the Rev. William Lirely. The two men wanted a place where people from all walks of life could worship together. So they set their sight on Bald Knob, the one-thousand foot high mountain near Alto Pass, Illinois.

Word of the unusual project spread and, in faith, the men borrowed \$10 thousand to purchase the land. A group was formed to organize the project. Originally, the cross was to be 40-feet high lit by electric light bulbs. While the men were breaking ground for the foundation, a visiting Ohio family suggested they build an even bigger cross and invite help from believers across the nation.

So Presley stopped the project and made a trip to surrounding states where he found encouragement from people of all walks of life. He returned and began making plans for the great cross.

A farm widow Myrta Clutts, of Cobden, Illinois, pledged \$100 to help buy the land. She did not know where that money would come from. But, shortly after her decision, one of her sows bore 21 pigs – more than three times the average litter. Those pigs would raise more than the \$100 she had pledged! Presley took the females, and started raising more pigs. Soon he had almost a hundred sows who produced more than 1,500 pigs. These he distributed, to farmers in the lower half of Illinois who mailed the proceeds to the cross fund. During those three years, almost \$30 thousand was raised from Mrs. Clutts' \$100 pledge.

For many local residents, the Bald Knob Cross is a symbol of faith. One woman writes, "The Bald Knob Cross is something that will always be near and dear to my heart. I was raised in Alto Pass. We spent many weekends with my grandparents when we were growing up. From my grandma's kitchen window you could see the cross in clear view. It was an amazing memory for me. It was so beautiful, peaceful. For me, too, it stands for family, hope, happiness, and togetherness."

The Cross has fallen under hard times in the past decade, mainly due to its age, and many are joining together to repair it to its former glory. Their web-site tells the story and their purpose – that it might stand as a testament to God's love. For me the story is also a reminder of what believers can do when they are united together in testimony. I am thankful for visual tributes to the faith like the Bald Knob Cross. I hope that It will continue to stand for many years to come as a testimony to God's love and to the determination of His people.

That's what I think, and I'm Jamie Janosz for Prime Time America.