

Carrying the Cross of Jesus

Mark 15:16-20

INTRO:

We are following Jesus through the streets of Jerusalem this fifth Sunday of Lent. He knows what is going to happen, and so do we. This morning we will think about helping Jesus. We often have opportunities to help Jesus, usually in small ways that go unnoticed by the world. We will look at one of the “**little people**” in the Gospel that helped Jesus in a very visible way. We will see if he can teach us how we can help Jesus today.

ME:

It seems strange to me to speak about *helping* Jesus. Jesus helps us so much, he has, he does and he will. *This reminds me of Ernestine Oliver!* When I visit with her, after we pray and I am getting ready to leave, I always say to her, “**God Bless you, Ernestine.** And she always says, “**He has, he does, and he will!**” Ernestine, or “**Teeny,**” is one of the “**little people**” who helps Jesus. *She has, she does, and she will... however she can, for however long she can!*

YOU:

Have you ever thought about ways that you can help Jesus? Perhaps it is a strange idea to you too. But you will meet again one who helped Jesus

in a real and important way. May you have eyes to see how you can respond to this. Let's look at Mark's Gospel together:

GOD:

Mark 15:16 Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. 17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. 18 And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" 19 They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. 20 After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

21 They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. 22 Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). 23 And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

WE:

"Simon, a man from Cyrene, Alexander and Rufus' father, was coming in from the countryside. They forced him to carry his cross." The *"little people"* of the Gospel. All those seemingly insignificant, little people who

briefly step onto the stage of the drama of Jesus, quickly play their parts, and then are never heard from again. For example:

- the widow who dropped her one small coin into the temple offering and was noticed by Jesus,
- the little boy who offered his few loaves and fishes so that Jesus could feed a multitude,
- the centurion who, at the foot of the cross, acclaimed Jesus as Son of God.

These are the people who rate barely a couple of verses of scripture, those little people, often unnamed, whose lives we know mostly by their reflection in the light of the life of Jesus. We're thinking about these little people because that describes most of us. Most of us will not merit even a footnote when the story of our age is told. We are little people, living in little out-of-the-way places, who go about our lives doing the best we can, nothing heroic, large, or spectacular.

It's been said that:

If Jesus doesn't mean something for the little people, then he doesn't mean much.

So, again and again, some little person steps into the spotlight, and we see ourselves in that person and we take heart, for most of us are just trying to follow Jesus in little, unspectacular ways. This Palm Sunday, as Jesus moves toward his cross and the great drama of our redemption is being

worked out, the spotlight falls briefly on a man named Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. We don't know from where he came, other than Cyrene, or why he was in Jerusalem on that day when the procession of violence passed by him. Not a word is spoken of him after this moment. But he is remembered by name, even by his father's name, because that day some Roman soldier pointed toward the crowd on the sidewalk and said, **“You, come over here. Help this prisoner drag this cross up the hill.”** Simon is remembered by us as the one who was pulled out of the crowd to help bear the cross of Jesus. Jesus told us, on a number of occasions, that he would suffer and die. He also told us that we must take up the cross and follow him. We must notice a couple of things about Simon:

- (1) The cross was not something he chose, but something that was chose him.
- (2) The cross was placed upon his shoulders because a Roman compelled him to carry the cross. On some days in the church we celebrate the saints, the heroes of faith who, by their lives and their deaths, heroically pointed the way.

On this Palm Sunday let's remember Simon, the little man who got to help Jesus carry the cross. Take Simon as a parable for some of the days in your life when, to your surprise, you are asked to come forward to help

bear the cross of Jesus. I love noticing the simple, quiet, unspectacular but deeply faithful ways many of you step up and take up the cross of Jesus.

I'm glad Simon was there on that very day when Jesus moved toward Calvary. I'm glad that Mark told Simon's story in the story of Jesus. If he had not been *there*, I don't know if I could be *here*. This week we walk behind Jesus as he goes to the cross, stares evil in the face, confronts the principalities and powers, and gives his life over to the providence of God. Ultimate matters will be worked out among us before the end of this week. The battle to be fought on Friday is huge, cosmic, eternal. And on the way, a few ordinary, everyday little people get called out of the crowd to be disciples, to help Jesus carry the cross. I am sure that when it becomes your turn to take up the cross and follow, you'll be there. "**Must Jesus bear the cross alone?**" the old hymn asks. No. From out of the crowd, a few ordinary people are called to bear it before the world with him. That's you.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

Jesus does not bear the cross alone, we help him if we are willing.

YOU:

Are you willing? How will you use your life to help Jesus in big and small ways?

CLOSE:

Must Jesus bear the crops alone? No. Simon helped Jesus. Jesus told us to take up our crosses and follow him. **Follow him to where?** Follow him to the Place of the Skull where he was crucified. The cross.

George McLoud said:

“I simply argue that the Cross should be raised at the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles; but on a cross between two thieves; on the town’s garbage heap; at a crossroads so cosmopolitan they had to write his title in Hebrew and Latin and Greek . . . at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where He died. And that is what He died about. That is where church people ought to be and what church people ought to be about.”

We can help Jesus by helping people in life and death in good times and bad times. When we help others, we help Jesus. We may even help them get a glimpse of Jesus and develop a hunger for his love.

I want to leave you with some words made popular by the Fifth Dimension. Let’s let it be our closing prayer. It’s in your notes so I invite you to pray it with me out loud, It is by Richard of Chichester. Let’s pray it together now:

Day by day, Dear Lord, of thee three things I pray: To see thee more clearly, Love thee more dearly, Follow thee more nearly, Day by day. —“ Day by Day,” Richard of Chichester