

**Mark 15:21**

*“And they pressed into service a passerby coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), that he might bear His cross.”*

Many people are passersby in life. They do not want to get involved. They see others walking toward them along the sidewalk and they turn their eyes away. They have their circle of friends who they associate with, but they do not want that circle to become any bigger.

I don't know what kind of a man Simon of Cyrene was; if he was an introvert or an extrovert; if he had a large circle of friends or a small one. But that Good Friday morning on the outskirts of Jerusalem he was intending on being just a passerby. Simon did not get up earlier that morning and tell his wife that he intended on getting involved with Jesus that day. As a man from North Africa he may not have even known who Jesus was. Yet, he was the man who was forced to carry His cross.

Whatever drew Simon to Jerusalem that day; whatever plans he had made for himself, the Roman soldiers had other plans for him. Out of the crowd passing by, Simon from North Africa is the man they selected to carry the cross of Jesus. His first reaction may not have been good. “Why me?” he may have muttered under his breath. It would have been a big, splintery, heavy piece of wood. There would be no reward for doing this—no payment; not even a “Thank you” from the soldiers. But the law was the law, and so Simon picked up Jesus' cross and lugged it up the hill.

We meet Simon in the Scriptures on Good Friday and we never hear of him again. If Double Day had been a publishing company 2,000 years ago, they would have offered Simon a lucrative book deal. The story of the man who carried Jesus' cross...in his own words! But nothing was written. Nothing was recorded for us. We don't know how heavy that cross was; how long it took Simon to carry it to the top of Calvary. We don't know why Simon was in Jerusalem that day. We don't know if he stuck around to watch the soldiers drive the nails into Jesus' hands and feet; if he stayed long enough to watch Jesus die. All the Scriptures tell us about Simon is that he was a passerby; a man from Cyrene who was forced to carry Jesus' cross.

2,000 years from now, if this earth is still in motion, what if anything will the Christians living then know about us? Will we, to them, be seen simply as passersby in life; as people who came and went? Perhaps this is how we often see ourselves...as people who really don't matter that much. Some of us pretty much keep to ourselves. Others of us are more out-going. But after we are gone will any one of us be remembered as someone who was more, really, than just a passerby in life?

There is one more bit of information the Scriptures tell us about Simon of Cyrene. He was the father of Alexander and Rufus. It's mentioned simply as a side note, but it is mentioned. Rufus and Alexander...these young men are reputed to have been Christians in the Early Church. We know nothing more about them except that they were Christian men. But now we can fill in the missing pieces about Simon.

Simon was just a passerby...at first. But something more happened to him that day than just the simple action of carrying Jesus' cross. His children became Christians. This strongly suggests to us that Simon did get involved with Jesus; that he did not lay the cross down at the top of the hill and walk away. Simon needed to know more about this man who was being crucified. Why was the man, whose cross he carried, being put to death? Simon would have asked questions. Perhaps of the soldiers...more likely of those who were followers of Jesus—the women who slowly walked behind Simon and Jesus, weeping as they went. Simon apparently was there long enough to hear Jesus Himself speak from the cross, not words of anger or retaliation, but words of love..."Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Who is this man who forgives his enemies; who forgives those causing his intense suffering?

It is necessary for us to fill in these missing pieces about Simon; to draw these conclusions about him because children in any family do not become Christians on their own. Simon's sons would have become Christians because Simon became something more than just a passerby. He was drawn into Jesus' death. He became involved with Jesus.

For the same reason, you my friend are not just a passerby in life. Jesus has gotten involved with you. Your parents saw the value, the benefits of Holy Baptism, and they brought you to those sacred waters, and there you like Simon, became involved with Jesus. There you, too, were drawn into His death. You are sitting here tonight because of this involvement with Jesus. Most of the world passes by through Lent without ever pausing to notice the cross of Jesus. But you are not one who passes by. You made time to be here this evening; to be involved with your Lord.

But this was not your decision. Simon did not ask to become involved with Jesus. He was selected for this purpose...and so were you. God selected you. God chose you. Out of all the people passing by, God in mercy, chose you and drew you into the death of Christ. That's why you are baptized. That's why you are here tonight. That's why you proclaim His death every time you eat His body and drink His blood in His Sacrament. You did not volunteer. God selected you in love.

And so how will you be remembered? As one who came and went? As nothing more than a passerby in life? Perhaps to the Christians in future generations. But not to your God. He remembers you as one who is in Christ. To Him you are His chosen one; one for whom Christ died; one who, like Simon, is privileged to have been drawn into Jesus' death for you. God remembers you always as one for whom Jesus prayed: "Father, forgive them." And He does...day after day...He forgives you of all your sins. Not because you got involved with Jesus, but because Jesus got involved with you; because He shed His blood for you. Amen.