

**A Passerby Believer  
Palm/Passion Sunday  
Year B Mark 15:16-39**

He was a minor character in the passion narrative, so minor that he is only mentioned in one brief verse in the story leading up to the crucifixion of our Lord:

**“And 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.”**

Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Who is this person who finds himself close to Jesus at the time of his journey to the cross? Why is he mentioned? Is it important? Is it important to us still today?

Certainly Simon of Cyrene came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. If he was a Jew, he would have come to Jerusalem if he could. It was the holiest time of the year the time of Passover.

Certainly Simon of Cyrene found himself pressed upon simply as a passerby to take up a cross that was not his.

And, certainly Simon of Cyrene felt afraid that the cross for who seemed like a criminal would become his cross if he did not comply.

Or, did Simon willingly place himself there, knowing Jesus already? What kind of knowledge did this Simon of Cyrene have?

Much of this we can never know, but this we do know based upon the witness of the Gospel: Simon of Cyrene was the Father of Alexander and Rufus. Who are Alexander and Rufus? Today, it is lost on us who they are; however, the people who heard this original Gospel of Mark, the first hearers of the Gospel – they likely knew them personally.

The community of Christians who knew the Gospel story, who knew the history of the passion, who were Christians themselves, must have known Alexander and Rufus. Alexander and Rufus were Christians who came to faith because of their father Simon of Cyrene and was a part of this first community of believers, the first church.

But, why? How is it that Simon of Cyrene came to faith, came to believe in Jesus Christ? Did something happen to him on the road to Calvary? Did he have an exchange with Jesus? Did he see something about this Messiah that the others could not at that time? The road to the cross, brought Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, to faith.

It is an amazing story! This small sentence in the bible shows us the faith of a passer-by, someone who got caught up in the struggle of a person who was thought to be a common criminal. Yet, this small sentence reveals that Simon of Cyrene became a believer in Christ, either that day or very soon after, and his family took after him in that regard. Listen to the verse again:

**“And 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.”**

Now imagine what might have happened that day that brought Simon of Cyrene to faith:

Suddenly a prisoner, who is Jesus, drops the wooden beam on which he will soon be crucified. Merciless flogging prior to this has caused Jesus to likely be so weakened, he could not finish carrying it. The soldiers will not stoop to pick it up, but legally they can force somebody else to do it. Simon is the closest able-bodied man. He simply finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Having no alternative, Simon shoulders the prisoner's cross. He likely gets blood on his garments. His good clothes become smudged with dust. He struggles and sweats, carrying the a large wooden beam on his shoulders, all the way down rough city streets, a hostile crowd on both sides of him. Some of the bystanders probably laugh at him, maybe even more than that. It's a nightmare.

Finally they reach the place of the Skull outside the city, likely a place where the people dumped their trash, and Simon drops his burden only to see a horrifying scene of execution. The soldiers get on with their business of nailing the prisoner's hands the beam and then hoist Jesus up to the top of a permanent beam stuck in the

ground, no doubt used before for this very purpose and nail his feet. And, then they sit there and gamble for his clothes and wait, the depth of human cruelty on full display.

What does Simon of Cyrene do? Does he stay to watch this horrific scene or does he leave, later to hear that this man he helped was raised from the dead? Does he feel suddenly moved with compassion? Does Mary Magdalene or Mary the mother of Jesus move him? Does he witness the Roman guard who claims that Jesus is the Son of God? We don't know. We cannot know. All we know is that his sons come to faith from this cross bearing experience.

As we travel through this most Holy week, beginning our journey with the joyous palms of victory, stopping at the Lord's final supper with his friends, the new commandment he give them, witnessing his final breath on Good Friday, and lastly relishing in the glory of God's victory over the grave, let us consider our faith journey that is not unlike Simon of Cyrene. Like him, how will we walk with Jesus? How will we come to faith or find our faith

renewed again? And, how will we pass that faith on to our families, witnessing to the passion of our Lord?

**“And 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.”**

Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, was compelled by Roman soldiers to go to the place of execution, carrying a cross for Jesus.

We are gathered in this online place today for a variety of reasons. We may be here because of habit, duty, commitment, joy, curiosity, or spiritual need,

What matters is not how we got here, but what we recognize. Do we see a heartless execution, or something more as Simon of Cyrene did? In this incident of a man put to death, in the bread broken and wine poured out for us, in the cross that is our sign of salvation, we can come to a faith that transforms us and leads us onward...to the empty tomb.

May we walk this Holy Week together. Amen.