

Witness Sermon Series: Simon of Cyrene
“A Life Changing Moment!”

Dear Friends in Christ,

As I reflected on today’s Lenten witness, Simon of Cyrene, the first thought that came into my mind was that *“it must have been a life-changing moment – it just had to be!”* Here you are, a good Jewish man having journeyed nearly 900 miles from Cyrene to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem, and your plans are dramatically changed as you enter the city! Your travel was hard and long and perilous, no \$69 Southwest air fares available from Eastern Libya to Jerusalem. You are tired but excited, fulfilling a life-long dream to be in the Holy City for the Passover.

Surely, you expected the place to be teeming with the faithful, but you were not prepared for an atmosphere heavy with dissension, the city in an uproar. You were not prepared for the angry mobs that crowded the street, some shouting, others weeping bitterly. You were not prepared to be the one pulled from the crowd and *“compelled”* by the Roman soldiers to help carry the Cross of a man named Jesus! *It must have been a life-changing moment – it just had to be!*

Some 2000 years later here we are, the name of a man called Simon of Cyrene, indelibly etched in the Passion History of Christ. Matthew, Mark and Luke each provide information on this witness to the crucifixion. Matthew is direct and plain: *“They... led [Jesus] away to be crucified. As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross.”* (Matthew 27:31-32) Mark, in his Gospel, provides details that Matthew didn’t- that Simon was just arriving in the city and had two sons: *“And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.”* (Mark 15:21) Luke paints the scene even more vividly: *“And as they led [Jesus] away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.”* (Luke 23:26) Talk about a Passover pilgrimage gone bad – Simon of Cyrene was having a bad day! *It must have been a life-changing moment – it just had to be!*

So, what happens to a good Jewish boy from Cyrene as he walks behind Jesus, forced to carry the cross beams? Surely, he had to be thinking, *“What had this Jesus done to warrant being beaten to a pulp, spit upon, mocked and ridiculed, wearing a crown of thorns, so weak that it was obvious He would not make to Golgotha’s Hill without some help?”* Just suppose it was you, me, *“compelled, seized”* - no choice but to step out of the crowd and bear the cross? Would not the journey of seeing an innocent man crucified on rugged beams you helped carry; hearing

the nails pounded by the soldiers into His hands and feet – would not the experience leave a lasting impression? Would not the words you heard Jesus speak from the cross forever change your life, the Savior reaching out the very ones who did such a cruel, unjust deed, praying: *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do?”* (Luke 23:34) *It must have been a life-changing moment for Simon of Cyrene – it just had to be!*

I would like to think the same is true for us in our Lenten pilgrimage as we focus on the life story of these Witnesses in the final week of the life of Jesus? In the immortal words of the late radio broadcaster, Paul Harvey, I would like to think that the *“rest of the story”* is so compelling and dramatic that there is no way any of us – not you – not me – not the bystander who could care less – not the skeptic or doubter – not the person, young or old forced to come to church – not the atheist or agnostic or sophisticated spiritual elitist – not the worst sinner or the foulest hypocrite – would not be moved to a life-changing moment of faith when walking behind Jesus on the way to Calvary’s Cross! Put yourself right there in the crowd next to Simon, *“compelled, seized,”* carrying the rugged cross to that hill – where the Son of God suffers and dies for the sins of the world – yet is looking straight at you, praying, *“Father, forgive!”* *It just has to be a life-changing moment – it just has to be!*

I have little doubt that Simon of Cyrene’s life was changed by this unexpected encounter with Jesus. I think

he went home and told his wife and his sons, Rufus and Alexander of what he had witnessed. Simon came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover but experienced so much more – witnessing the Passover Lamb’s ultimate sacrifice, the Messiah and Savior giving His life on Calvary’s Cross, rising on Easter morn to give everlasting hope to all who believe! No wonder Mark mentions Simon’s sons by name, and Paul, in his closing of the Letter to the Romans, sends personal “greetings” [note this] *to Rufus, chosen in the Lord, also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.*” (Romans 16:13) You see, my friends, when you carry the cross of Jesus “*it just has to be a life-changing moment – it just has to be!*”

So, how is it with you and me, followers of Jesus today? Sometimes I wonder how changed we really are, and perhaps the criteria to consider in our faith walk is how “*compelled*” we are today to willingly step out of the crowd and take up the cross of Jesus. Being here, in a church, that’s easy! Being a preacher, paid to talk about Jesus – that’s even easier! But how about out there, on the daily road of life, choosing to follow the will and way of Christ when the world says, “*Do it whatever way you want?*” What does it mean to take up the cross and follow Jesus, when the culture views Christian views as way too rigid, unloving and out-of-touch; when values are being redefined by the times rather than by the true, inspired Word of God? How often do you, do I, dare to take on Satan’s soldiers, standing up against sin and temptation, stepping up to take the high road in

relationships, choosing to deny self in order to lift up the love of Christ in the life of someone else? Is the cross simply an ornament on a chain, the jewelry we wear a mockery of the faith we profess, or a living witness to the Lord who loved us so much? Tough questions for tough times, because if Jesus doesn't make a difference in our lives, in our homes, in our words and deeds, then world will conclude that Jesus makes no difference at all!

Would that it could be said of me, just like Simon of Cyrene, *“He was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus!”* *“Seized”* by a love that would not let me go; *“forgiven,”* by words I do not deserve to hear; *“changed”* by grace through faith to serve a Savior who loved me with His life! Would that it could said of you – of this church – of our witness to the community around us – ***“they seem compelled to take up the cross and follow Jesus.”*** When you carry the cross of Jesus, you see, *it just has to be a life-changing moment – it just has to be!*

AMEN!

Portions of sermon adapted from:
“Simon of Cyrene Carries the Cross of Jesus,” written by Amy Miller, www.sharefaith.com
“Simon of Cyrene,” Daily Bible Study by Wayne Blank, www.keyway.ca