

“CARRYING THE CROSS”

Pastor Mike Corwin

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT

TEXT: MARK 15:21 & 1 PETER 4:7-11

SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 16: 24-28

I – SIMON OF CYRENE:

Mark 15:21 (NLT)

²¹A man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the country just then, and they forced him to carry Jesus’ cross. (Simon is the father of Alexander and Rufus.)

He has only one line in the entire Bible and yet he’s become famous. He’s included in the Passion and all the other movies made about the crucifixion of Jesus. There have been stories and plays written about him. Simon of Cyrene, the man who finished carrying the cross of Jesus to the top of the hill.

After being arrested, Jesus had been up all night. He had been drug before numerous religious leaders where he had been smacked around and questioned. They in turn sent him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. After questioning him, Pilate turned Jesus over to the Roman soldiers who took him out and stripped him, mocked him, and repeatedly and savagely beat him. When they were done, they had him pick up the cross beam of his cross and the long procession started up the hill to the place of execution. Jesus was tired because of no sleep. He was worn out from all the abuse, and he was weakened by the loss of blood he had endured as the cat of nine tails tore away his flesh. As he walks with this heavy log on his shoulders it bites into the raw muscle the whips had exposed on his shoulder and he stumbles and falls, unable to carry it any further. Simon carries it the rest of the way.

We’ve come to look at Simon as this wonderful bystander who out of love and compassion for Jesus stepped forward and carried our Lord’s burden. That’s not what it says. Simon was “forced” to carry the cross. He was commandeered by the Roman soldiers and had no choice. It wasn’t out of love and compassion he carried the cross, it was out of fear of pain or death by the Romans that he picked it up and followed Jesus. This was his ministry, and he was forced to do it.

II - FORCED MINISTRY:

Now I know that none of you have ever felt “forced” to do ministry, have you? Forced is such an ugly word, let’s say “compelled”. You’ve never once felt compelled to work for the church, to do

ministry for Jesus, have you? You sure have...we all have. It's not always an easy task to pick up our cross and follow Jesus, is it?

How many times has the phone rang and you hated to answer it because you were getting tired of making casseroles for funeral dinners? How many times have you looked at your calendar and remembered you had a committee meeting you had to go to when you just wanted to stay home and read the paper? How many times have you seen a member of the nominations committee approaching you in the fall and wanted to run the other way because not only didn't you want to serve on a committee, but you also didn't even want to have to tell them no. You're tired of teaching Sunday School...you don't want to help with the chicken barbeque...you don't want to guard the parking lot...you don't want to wipe kids noses in the nursery...and the list goes on and on.

The truth of the matter is we don't always want to do the ministry of the church and Jesus. It's not always pleasant and we aren't always filled with joy over it. We all have our own crosses to bear so why do we want to pick up Jesus' cross and carry it too. It's too heavy for me; let someone else pick it up! Let someone else do it! I only want to do the easy stuff.

III – TEXT:

Well, I'd like to stand here today and give you the words that it's okay to feel that way, that it's okay to sit back and do nothing, that it's okay to just throw up your hands and say you don't want to play anymore in this thing called Christian service...but I can't. I can't because that's not what it says in the Book we call the Bible, the book we revere as the Word of God. Matter of fact it says just the opposite.

There are numerous places in this book that say we have all been gifted to do God's work, that we are all called to do God's work, and that we should all be doing God's work. We should all pick up our cross and follow Jesus. Just one such example is found in this morning's Scripture from 1 Peter:

1 Peter 4:7 (NLT)

⁷The end of the world is coming soon. Therefore, be earnest and disciplined in your prayers.

Christians are to live their lives in belief that their final Salvation is just around the corner. This stimulates our Faith and encourages us in our difficulties. We are to live our lives knowing we may be standing in front of Jesus in the very next instance. It's because of this knowledge that we are to be disciplined in our behavior and life, and in communion through prayer with God.

1 Peter 4:8 (NLT)

⁸Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.

It always comes back to love. For God and for one another. The love he's speaking of isn't the gooey emotional kind we see on the Hallmark channel. It's the kind that results in forgiving people who wrong us, the kind that drives us to acts of charity and kindness, the kind that makes us shine as a beacon for Jesus. We can forgive others because we know we've been forgiven. We can love others because we know we are loved. God so loved the world that he sent his Son, who covered all our sins.

1 Peter 4:9 (NLT)

⁹Cheerfully share your home with those who need a meal or a place to stay.

One of those acts of kindness is hospitality. Hospitality is a concrete expression of love in the world. When we serve a Thanksgiving dinner, or a funeral dinner, it shows love for people. When we take meals on wheels to someone or give food for the food pantry, we're showing loving hospitality. Notice it says to be happy about doing it.

1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)

¹⁰God has given gifts to each of you from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Manage them well so that God's generosity can flow through you.

Every one of us made by God has been given a ministry to perform and been given the gifts/talents to do it. It is when we use them that the love of God flows through us and into the world. If we don't do what we're called and gifted to do, someone doesn't get that love.

1 Peter 4:11 (NLT)

¹¹Are you called to be a speaker? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Are you called to help others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then God will be given glory in everything through Jesus Christ. All glory and power belong to him forever and ever. Amen.

Paul breaks it down into two categories. You are either called to preach and teach, or you're called to serve. Whichever it is do it with gusto. Say it like it was coming from God's own mouth, do it like God's own hands were doing it. Do not just go through the motions but put all your energy and strength into it. Remember who you are working for...the best and most powerful boss in the universe...God. When we serve him well people meet him, people find Jesus, and they get the honor and glory as we build the Kingdom by our Christian work.

IV – COMPELLED TO CARRY THE CROSS:

We are compelled to carry the cross. Nowhere in this passage by Peter do you see phrases like if you get around to it would you please take the time to love one another. You don't see Peter telling us that we should pray earnestly, be disciplined, and live like it could be our last day...after

we're done watching American Idol on TV. Peter doesn't tell us that God gave us gifts to use, and we can take it or leave it. Peter says you have a job...do it. You've been loved, now love others. It doesn't say that you can just do it when you feel like it and take numerous breaks; it says to do it with all your strength and energy. You are compelled to pick up this cross and carry it.

In the reading from this morning, you heard Jesus tell his disciples then and now, if you want to be a Christian, then you have to pick up your cross and follow me. You must quit worrying about what makes you feel good, about your own personal agendas, about your own selfish ambition and follow me, do what I command. Jesus said if you love what this world has to offer, you'll lose your life, but if you love Jesus, you'll keep it forever.

And it's worthwhile to carry the cross. It's through carrying the cross; through doing the work of Christian service that the lives of others are changed. I know that Simon was forced to carry the cross that day, that it wasn't what he had come to town to do, but because he did, lives were changed. Besides the obvious that Jesus was crucified and saved us all, look at what else happened. Did you ever wonder why Mark added that Simon was the father of Rufus and Alexander? Because they were known to the early church. Simon must have been changed by his encounter with Jesus, he must have taken the message of Salvation back to his family and the town of Cyrene, because in Romans 16:13 we see that Rufus became big in the Christian church in Rome. And in Acts 11:20 we see that it was believers from Cyrene who helped spread the Gospel to us Gentiles. Thank God Simon was forced to carry the cross.

V – YOU ARE SIMON:

I want to tell you today that each and every one of you is a Simon. Jesus does not walk this earth today in human form. Just as it was on that first Good Friday, he is unable to carry his own cross and he compels every one of us to shoulder it for him and carry it up the hill. He calls each of us to see to it that the lives of others don't get lost on the road of death, but that they make it all the way to the top of the hill, all the way to Calvary where their Salvation can be found in the one who hangs on the cross.

This week I want you to spend some time in prayer and contemplation in how you can use your strength and energy to serve God. Maybe it's washing someone's windows or raking someone's leaves. Maybe it's shoveling snow or carrying groceries. You have the ability to do something.

What are you called to do? What gifts have you been given? Use all your strength, all your energy, pick up your cross and follow Jesus up the hill. Because when you carry the cross, others will find Jesus, lives will be changed.

AMEN