

Luke 23:26–31

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[0 : 0 0] ago, we weren't able to gather at all in person. And a year from now, we will enter through these doors into magnificent space that will celebrate our Lord and the fullness of his work for generations. But you were here on the front steps for the first Good Friday service.

Tonight, I want us to reflect on Simon of Cyrene, who was seized upon to take up the cross of Christ, and the daughters of Jerusalem, whose cries of lament got an unexpected response from Christ.

Let me just read a portion of that again for you. As they led him 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. And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. Jesus saying to them, daughters of Jerusalem.

There's an unexpected puzzle before us in these verses. There's a surprise that breaks with the conventional way one would write a story relaying the climactic moments. And here's what it is.

[1 : 3 7] Why in the world is the reader being introduced to new characters, especially now? Now, we've arrived at the pivotal moment in the gospel. Jesus is now on his way to Golgotha with a cross on him. All eyes should be on Jesus. But no, Luke takes hold of his gospel's climax and shifts our gaze from Jesus to a man by the name of Simon of Cyrene into a group of women known only as the daughters of Jerusalem.

Why are previously unknown persons suddenly sharing the stage with Jesus on Good Friday? One man pressed into service for Christ. Many mourners pressed on something more lamentable than the death of Christ.

And here's the answer. Luke wants us to have more than Jesus on our minds. Yes. We rightly reserve Good Friday to reflect on the death of Christ.

But Luke would also include a man, an ordinary man to remind us of the cross every follower of Christ must take up.

[3 : 1 7] And he calls on ordinary women in the text who have come to mourn his death, to warn us of a future event, according to Jesus, more lamentable than his own death.

This is worth careful attention of our mind and heart. When you think of Simon of Cyrene, and we will now, let's consider what the cross he bore was meant to mean.

This man hailed from modern day Libya. He was well-traveled. And he had no intention on this day of running into one named Jesus or learning what his death might mean.

He was simply going about his life. Did you know, though, that twice already in Luke's gospel, Jesus had spoken about the necessity that all of his followers would need to take up their own cross? First in Luke 9, 23, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. And then again in Luke 14, verse 27, Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciples.

[4 : 5 2] Two times from Jesus' own lips. If you want to walk with God. To pick up a phrase from last Sunday morning in Genesis.

If you want to walk with God, you'll need to fall in line behind Jesus. Having told us what must be done in his gospel.

Luke, in the Simon of Cyrene narrative, now shows you that very thing being done. Let me just make it as simple as I can. What is typified in Simon of Cyrene is true for you and for me.

My pastor, my mentor, Kent Hughes, put it this way. Quote, So the bent silhouette of Simon from Cyrene trudging after Jesus made a striking profile for every disciple of the Savior.

Here's what I've been meditating on this week. Simon is embedded in the Good Friday text to foreshadow a truth that every one of us must fulfill.

[6 : 03] On the day that Jesus went to the cross to make a substitution for all sin. We see in this man one who was not even looking for him.

Nevertheless, emulating in his own actions the very call of the Christian faith.

And so, tonight, as you consider Christ's death, we also should ask ourselves some questions. Am I in line behind Jesus?

Or, have I simply been committed to trudging across the face of this earth of a path on my own making?

Are you bearing your particular gospel weight well? Are you walking the road according to your conscience without compromise?

[7 : 10] Are you close enough to him that you could hear him speak? Are you living under his word?

We cannot be followers if we're not following. And we're not yet living as we ought if he is not leading.

I don't know what state you've come in tonight. But to dip in and out of line into every alleyway that the procession of Christ should go to do your own thing and to catch up to him in a block or two down the road is not what he has for us.

All the delights of this earth are in traveling close to him. Earlier today, I had the great privilege of speaking face-to-face with a member of our church who, in her own way, is bearing great gospel weight and physical duress.

You want to mention her tears, and all she wants to talk about are her triumphs, his triumphs. You want to mention her difficulties, and she begins to speak about God's desires for her.

[8 : 35] You want to mention her pain, and she responds with his promises. And I'm looking at this one today who is stumbling behind our Lord all the way to heaven's gates.

Brothers and sisters of Christ Church Chicago, embrace the cross that he is asking you to bear. I don't know what that is.

Embrace the sufferings of Christ. Expect nothing more from God than the joy of a participation on his road.

For by it, you and I prove ourselves to be his disciples. Let's take a look at the daughters of Jerusalem.

What do they add to our gathering this evening? Mourners whose cries of lament went out for Jesus. You can almost envision them and hear their loud lamentations on the Via Della Rosa, the way of sorrows, this eighth station of the cross.

[9 : 55] They came to lament his death, but Jesus would have them leave contemplating a more dire day of their own eschatological doom.

He actually said to them, daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

They will begin to say that the mountains fall on us and the hills cover us. For if they are doing these things when the wood is green, you can envision Jesus and all his vigor and strength.

What will they happen when it is dry? And our own lives are withered sticks and ready for the fire. Their cries were outdone by those of Jesus.

His voice would speak on Good Friday, elevating above their own. And he would quote the prophecy of Hosea, which foretold of the day of God's wrath that would be unleashed at the end of time.

[11 : 10] The same words of Jesus' text where the stones crying out that they would fall on us are used not only in Hosea to signify Israel's imminent demise, but they're used in Revelation to signify the day when you and I are going to look them in the eye.

What's going on here? Traditionally, Lent, which we've now been through, and Good Friday especially, are days of lamentation on the death of Christ.

But, I want you to hear the word of Christ tonight. While His death is worthy of lament, a coming day of surpassing lament, yet stands on the distant horizon, and it involves us, not Him.

How much time have we given to considering it? This is the day. Tonight is the time. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are those who put themselves into the Good Friday narrative by way of determining to fall in line behind Him, learn to live under His word as well as they can, commit to not walking in and outside of His path, and understanding that I will see Him one day face to face, and I would have

Him receive me with joy.

[12 : 42] Enter into these gates. My child, the one for whom I have died. Good Friday. This is the best day of your life if you would hear the word of Christ and take His death by faith as perfectly adequate for your life in all of its frailty.

that would be Good Friday. To come to faith on the steps of the church or to recommit your way before the opening of a building.

To swing by this corner some 20 or 30 years from now and say to those in the car with you, that's where I stood.

That's where I sat on a Good Friday and considered to put my life behind Him, to walk with Him. That's the hour I contemplated for the briefest of moments that it was true I would one day stand before God and therefore gave my life to Him.

[14 : 24] So on this day, take up your rightful place behind Jesus and simply begin stumbling along.