

On the way to Calvary - Hilary McDowell
Week 5 Choices
Saturday - Just Passing By



The Crucifixion of Jesus

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. Mark 15:21-23 (NIV)

Love for Enemies

"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Luke 6:27-29 (NIV)

He was on his way to Jerusalem, the man from Cyrene. Perhaps he was a Jew fulfilling his duty as a pilgrim at Passover, or on business, or maybe he was just passing through. Who knows why Simon of Cyrene happened to be in that particular place, at that specific moment? But what happened next changed his life and the life of his family for ever.

To the traveller it looked quite cruel, the way the soldiers roughly halted the passer-by, turning him in his tracks and forcing him to his knees. She bristled at the sight, her 21st-century assertiveness and acute concern about human rights rising to her throat. Why doesn't he protest, she fumed to herself, or even try to run away? What right have they to do this to an innocent bystander? But she had forgotten how Jesus, when speaking to the Jews about their enemies, had highlighted these very aspects of Roman treatment of the locals. A soldier was permitted to take whatever he needed from a native, on demand (Luke 6:27-29).

Simon had no redress, neither to Roman law, nor to future western concepts of individual rights. He just happened, unfortunately, to be in the right place at the wrong time. Or was he? Tracy wasn't watching the soldiers any more but gazing intently at the bent figure of Jesus as his body braced itself for the

physical wrench as they roughly tore the crossbar off his shoulders and on to the ground. A pool of blood had already formed on the dirt in which he knelt, his wounds still dripping after the soldiers' treatment in the courtyard, the hair covering his forehead matted with the blood seeping from under the thorn-pricks of the crown.

It was the look in his eyes that she would never forget. Twisting his head to see what was happening to Simon, he gave the passer-by such a look of empathy and gratitude that Simon was no longer anticipating the weight of the wood or the welts from the ropes on his flesh as the soldiers carelessly transferred the crossbar from Jesus' body to his.

She envied Simon then. Of all the people whom God had placed in a position to help Jesus in his pain, only Simon had so far succeeded. Disciples, priests, lawyers, governors, dreamers, all had failed him, and this poor man, in from the country and just passing by, had succeeded where even she must fail. She longed to know more of this man. The Bible had told here so little. One thing was sure, though: if this was his first encounter with the living Christ, the story certainly did not end there. His two sons, Alexander and Rufus, had been well known to Mark when he came to write his Gospel. A whole family would one day be part of the victorious consequences of Christ's journey to Calvary, all because their father was in the right place at the wrong time. No - all because the Father God had placed Simon in exactly the right place at the right time; all because the creator knew the heart and mind of this quiet countryman and deemed him worthy to share in Christ's sufferings and not let him down.

She longed to ask Simon questions: 'Were you around later, when Paul preached about sharing the suffering of Christ?' Philippians 1:29, 3:10, or 'Didn't you consider that one look of love from Jesus' face a thousand times more significant to your life than the hard struggle up the hill with that blood-soaked, heavy crossbar? How could a man 'accidentally' help so well, she wondered, when so many, manipulative like Judas, or full of devotion like Peter, or pricked by conscience like Pilate, had failed miserably? Then she realised what Simon had done that the others had not. He had obeyed. Judas had disobeyed the command to submit his will to God's planning. Peter had forgotten that when he had obeyed Christ he could walk on water, so long as he did not take his eyes off Jesus to consider his own predicament. Pilate knew that the prisoner had done no wrong, but could not obey his own conscience when it was prodded by God. Simon obeyed even his enemies, when the law compelled him to carry an alleged criminal's cross.

Dear Father,

It is no coincidence that I stand where I stand today. I may be passing by, but please make me halt. Compel me by your love to look around and see what crosses I can carry in your name.

Look upon my suffering till I can see only the face of Jesus before my eyes - his tears for my wounds, his love for my fear, his smile of gratitude for my poor, small devotion. The hill is steep ahead, Lord. Let me climb it with you. Amen.