

Text: [Luke 23:26-31 \(CEB\)](#)
Date: March 15, 2026 – Fourth Sunday in Lent
Title: “Unlikely Companionship” – An Unlikely Lent Series, week 4
Theme: Our burdens are only bearable because God sends folks to help us carry them.

1

We were never meant to bear the burdens of life by ourselves

I'm always amazed at how sometimes the smallest gestures can mean the world

I remember when my father died – about 15 years ago now

I was serving the Succasunna church up north in Roxbury Township, Morris County

A wonderful congregation

And they knew things with Dad's health weren't good

I once left a church function to make an emergency trip out to Pittsburgh because they'd flown him from the local hospital

Drove like 85 the whole way out

When I walked in the hospital, I *heard* Dad before I could see him

He was agitated about the helicopter flight, didn't understand why all that was necessary

When I heard him giving everyone a hard time, I was like, “he'll be alright”

But it wasn't too long after that his condition got worse

Until finally Mom decided to bring him home on hospice

It meant a lot to me to see all his friends come and visit

It was like he was holding court some days, I swear
He always loved people and telling stories, and seeing him in his
element was something that made it just a little easier

One of the moments that made a big impression on me
Was at his funeral
There was a small contingent of folks from my church who made
the trip – about 4 hours each way
Just to be there for the service

They came knowing that all they'd be able to do was to pay
respects, say hello, and be present
That's it
Doesn't seem like much
Hardly worth 8 hours in the car – just to show up?
Except, it meant the world to me

It reminded me that I wasn't alone in what I was carrying
Sometimes that's the greatest gift anyone can offer
Is to help us carry that which is too heavy to carry by ourselves

2

Who are the people in your life who have done that for you?
Maybe you think of that one friend who has been with you in
EVERYTHING
Or maybe you think about a time when a stranger's kindness
changed your whole outlook, even though it was just a
moment
Perhaps you're reminded of someone who you've lost touch with,
but who saw you through a critical time
And remembering them makes you feel grateful, like you should
reach out
If that's something you take that away today, I won't be mad
about it

3

Simon of Cyrene is one of those people in the gospels who only appears for a moment
But the image of him – a bystander helping carry Jesus' cross – is one that stays with you

We don't know a ton about Simon
We know he was from North Africa – Cyrene was on the coast of Libya

We can speculate that he was likely a Jew on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover

Mark, in his gospel, names him as the father of Alexander and Rufus,
which makes it sound like Simon's sons were known in the early Christian community

Which makes me wonder: did Simon *already* know of Jesus?
Was *that* the reason he was in the crowd for the crucifixion – because he was a disciple invested in Jesus' life?

Or was he genuinely just passing by?
If that's the case, was there something about this experience of carrying Jesus' cross that led him to believe?
And is that how his sons came to faith – because their father told them how he helped carry Jesus' cross?
If there's someone in the story of Jesus' crucifixion I would love to know more about, it's Simon

But how did he even end up in this situation?
In Roman times, it was common to leave the vertical part of the cross in the ground along main thoroughfares into the city
So that they were always ready

The condemned would carry the cross beam to the place of
crucifixion, be nailed to it on the ground, and then hoisted
into place

But the practice of scourging the victim – whipping their backs
with cords embedded with shards of metal or bone
Was so cruel, and resulted in so much blood loss
That by the time the condemned started towards the site of
crucifixion

Many were ready to pass out
And that's where civilians – like Simon of Cyrene – could find
themselves pressed into short-term service

I always wonder what Simon saw when he looked into Jesus'
eyes

A Savior?

A human who had reached his breaking point?

A broken man desperate for help?

I wonder if he saw in Jesus' eyes a plea for help

And a thank you for this final kindness

I'm sure Simon went home that day with a tunic stained with
Jesus' blood

And with a hundred questions in his heart

4

There is so much human pain in the stories of Holy Week

Almost every type of pain we can imagine

It's just such a powerful reminder of the meaning of incarnation

And how Jesus stood at the center

Absorbing all of it

We think about the physical pain he suffered, of course

But that's not all

I also imagine the tremendous grief of the disciples
Feeling devastated by Jesus' death
Angry at their powerlessness in stopping it

Guilty because they hadn't done more
Cowardly for running away to save themselves
And fearful of what the future might hold for them

All of it just feels so raw
And so terrible

But then I think of the kindness of Simon
Now, I realize he had no choice
And I know that the soldiers weren't intending this to be a
kindness
They were probably just doing what was expedient to get off work
by 5:00, just wanting to get things over with

But regardless of the reason, it still turned out to be a kindness
Bestowed on a condemned and dying man

I'm not sure if Simon of Cyrene would have identified what
happened as his *ministry* to Jesus
But in later generations, our Methodist ancestors found inspiration
in ministry with the condemned in their final moments
Back in the 1700s, it was one of the unique markers of the
movement

They often visited prisons and, in particular, spent time in prayer
and conversation with those awaiting public hanging
Sometimes even traveling with them in wagons from the jail to the
gallows
Where they would often be pelted with items thrown by the crowd
Sometimes including rotten fruit and vegetables

The early Methodists took the lesson of Simon to heart
Because they knew that some burdens are too heavy to bear
alone

5

In life, every single one of us will experience something that
threatens to break us

That will make us feel like we're under a sentence of
condemnation

An accident, cancer, financial catastrophe, divorce, the death of
someone we love

We may feel as though something far too heavy has been laid
across our shoulders

My experience has been that in those moments, God sends me
someone like Simon

Someone who will help to carry what I can't

Even at the risk of getting some of my blood on them

When we are at our weakest

At our most vulnerable

We need people to come alongside us and lift some of that
burden from our shoulders so that we can take that next step

Sometimes, that looks like someone sitting with us and listening

Sometimes, that looks like someone helping with basics – doing a
load of laundry, cooking a meal, or paying a bill

Sometimes, that looks like someone advocating for you with a
doctor or with an insurance company

Sometimes, that looks like praying, or just showing up

There are a million ways we can carry the cross for one another

All of them important – though some may feel small to us

They matter to the person who is stumbling under the weight of
something too heavy for them

There are times when something as simple as a lasagna feels like
a lifeline

If you know someone who is struggling
Don't be part of the crowd that passes by
Look them in the eye
Reach out your hand

I know that sometimes, others' suffering scares us
Because in the eyes of those who are hurting, we see the thing
we most fear for ourselves

But when you're tempted to just turn away, to blend in with the
crowd
Remember: our burdens are only bearable because God sends
folks to help us carry them

Who has helped you to carry the cross?
Who can you help to carry theirs?

Amen.

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