



## CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

**Compelled Palm Sunday 3282021**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"They compelled a passerby who was coming in from the country to carry the cross. It was Simon Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus."

This week as we walk to the Cross with Jesus, I want you to think about our friend Simon of Cyrene. I feel like he's our kindred spirit. He's where you and I would have been had we been in those streets of Jerusalem on the day that they crucified Jesus. We would not have wanted to participate in this public display of violence. We would have wanted to actually pass by and be ignored and escape and not to be singled out at spear point. We would not have wanted to carry someone's cross.

They compelled Simon to carry the Cross, but I imagine that it easily could have been your back. Upon you, the trust would have been placed and you would have attempted to pull the beam on your back, dragging the beams as they were going against the ground. And your muscles are tightening up because you're trying to manage the unmanageable load. And then your back explodes on fire as the gravity shifts everything down as you try to climb up the Hill with the Cross. And alongside you walks a man with a crown of thorns on His head, and I want you to think of this last year, when you actually did carry a cross. For a whole year, you were Simon of Cyrene,

Though none of us wanted to, we were all compelled to live life differently. We had to take on things we did not want or ask to do. We had to disrupt all of our plans. And in some cases, our dreams were shattered forever because everything changed. Death came, job losses, income disappeared, and then we had to make sure that we stayed safe. And not only did we have to make sure we had to stay safe, we had to take care of those who were vulnerable around us. There were strangers in our midst who we're trying to take care of and not give them our viral load. And we wanted to make sure that these ICUs, which we never set foot in didn't fill up so that people who actually know how to save other people could do their job and not be overwhelmed. And alongside us walked the Son of Man who takes away the sins of the world.

None of us asked for this past year. A beautiful soul, Debie Thomas, wrote a reflection called *Crosses We Don't Choose*. And she honestly admitted. She

said, I would love to say that every time I carried a cross, I did it willingly. In reality, I am often a reluctant cross bearer. Yet this is what we do to avoid losing our humanity.

I think about my brother, Simon. All those centuries ago, he was carrying the method by which a man would be killed. I wonder as he was carrying it, was he tormented by that? Did he think to himself, how can I stop this? How do I save this man? How do I save myself? Is today going to be my last day too? Why did I come to this God forsaken place today?

A little aside about Simon. He's mentioned in our Gospel of Mark as being the father of Alexander and Rufus. Alexander and Rufus don't show up anywhere else in the Gospels, just here. Why what's the point of mentioning who he's a daddy of? Well, it was thought that when Simon went home, after carrying that Cross, at some point, he sat down and he told the story to his sons. And later on, as people would recount that day, that day that the Savior of the world died on the Cross, Rufus and Alexander would remember and tell that story that they heard from their dad. And what was the story they heard? They did not hear that their dad saved Jesus from the Cross. They did not hear that their dad made everything better. The story that they told over and over again was that their father was given a cross to carry and he did.

Simon didn't solve any problems. Simon didn't even know how the story was going to end. Simon simply bore the burden for the time being. And that was enough. Now, each one of you has been compelled to carry a cross. You didn't choose it. But as that beautiful soul, Debie Thomas says to us, "You shouldered the weight and you went up that hill. That is enough."

And here's the other beautiful thing that Debie tells us. She said, "God knows." This God knows more agonizingly well than we ever will what it's like to suffer alongside and not save. God does that a billion times a day. Things go wrong. Disasters happen. People are killed just by breathing or having a knee on their neck or going grocery shopping. In walking alongside and carrying the cross that has been given to you, you are participating in what God is doing in the first place - staying with us through the pain. And alongside you walks the One who will be crucified for our sake.

Welcome to Holy Week.