Easter through the Eyes of the Ordinary
4 Week Bible Study

Introduction

This is a self-study created to help us dig deeper into the Easter Story. Through this four week study, we will look at four different minor characters that play a role in the events of Holy Week. Though this study does not cover all minor characters, it touches on people who I think provide a great example of what it means to live out one’s faith and how one’s experiences change them.

There will be readings, quotes, and questions for you consider as you lead yourself through this study. There will also be quotes and concepts from the book, “On the Road to the Cross” by Rob Burkhart that will supplement.

As you complete this study, feel free to share your thoughts, observations, or questions with our community of faith or directly to DCO intern, Katie at kwenger@elcsmail.org. I would love to answer any questions or discuss things further with you.

Purpose of the Study

Easter is a profound moment in the life of Christ and of Christ followers. Sometimes it is taken for granted for us as Christ followers. We celebrate the Easter story on Easter Sunday and then quickly forget that Easter changes everything. Through the events that led up to the Resurrection of Christ, we see the incredible passion and love of God towards his people revealed. Through Jesus coming into the world, we are saved. Easter proclaims that death, sin, and the devil have been defeated. In Christ, the old is gone and the new has come. What a victory to proclaim!!

Because of this, Easter begs more out of us. It is a promised fulfilled and an opportunity to live out our faith authentically. But, how can we do this? We are going to take some hints from people in the scriptures that were living their daily life and encounter Christ in a moving way. Let’s discover how God is going to move in the midst of this and how He enters our daily lives as well.

Study Outline

April 19-Simon of Cyrene
April 26-The Centurion at the Cross
May 3-Joseph of Arimathea
May 10-Mary Magdalene
Week 1: Simon of Cyrene

Taking Up our Cross

Introduction

Simon is known as the man who carried Jesus’ cross on the way to be crucified. As our readings show, Matthew, Mark, and Luke speak to the story of Simon of Cyrene. They all are saying a similar thing, that Simon carries the cross of Jesus. Simon is in the crowd and is pulled out by the Romans to carry Jesus’s cross. But, these then are the only verses that he is mentioned. In the book of John, Simon is left out completely. This may be because in the book of John, there is a big focus on Jesus carrying our cross. We see certain parallels to the Lord in this illustration. It may be that He is showing that Jesus is the one who bore our sin and shame and carried it all on His own. Yet, Simon taking up the cross in the other Gospels leaves an interesting point for us to consider.

Like I said before, Simon is only mentioned in the Bible in three verses. So, not a lot is known about him. Yet, there is some research that has been done to learn about who he, why he was there, and the legacy he could have left. Simon of Cyrene is the name that he goes by because of the (obvious) that he is from Cyrene. Based on what we know about Cyrene, it was most likely in modern day Libya. With this being said, there is a good chance that he was a dark-skinned black man. So, why was he in Jerusalem? This could mean that he was a Jewish man coming for the Passover. At this time, many Jews lived in Cyrene. Yet, he could have been a dispersed Jew, who had never returned to Jerusalem. There is much belief that after Simon’s encounter with Jesus, he had become a Christian. In Mark, it even says that Simon has two sons Alexander and Rufus. This may mean that he passed along his faith to his sons and they are important later on in the story of Christians.

Simon carried Jesus’ blood spattered cross, witnessed his crucifixion, and heard the news of His resurrection. His life was changed that day on the way to Golgotha. As Simon’s story unfolds it offers to us this question: how will you carry your cross and follow Christ?

Readings

Please read the following verses and answer these questions for each: What happens? What stands out to you? What role does Simon play?

Matthew 27:32-44 (esp vs. 32)
• What was it that caused the Romans to single out and select this one man from all the people that lined the streets?
• Why would they choose a visitor of the city to be the one?
• What does it mean to be chosen to be in the service to the Romans?

Mark 15:16-21 (esp vs. 21)
• Why is it important that Simon’s children are mentioned?
• Look at Acts 11:19-20 and see the note of Cyrene. The Word has reached Cyrene. Antioch is the first part of going to the ends of the earth. There is no evidence that Simon was necessarily one of the men who was from Cyrene who preached the Word in this verse. But, think about it. There was a complete transformation of His life when He saw Jesus and he could have been sharing the life change that happened when he encountered Jesus.
• Look at Romans 16:13. A man named Rufus is mentioned here. This may allude to the fact that Paul was close with the family and that Simon passed along His faith to His family.

Luke 23:26-31 (esp vs. 26)
• What does Jesus tell those who are following him as Simon is carrying his cross?
• How would it Simon if he walked directly behind Jesus bearing his cross?
Through these verses, we can imagine a man changed by the words of Jesus and the actions that He saw on that painful, dark Friday. The verses that mention Simon add another dimension to meeting Jesus in our daily life. As Simon walked to Jerusalem, he was drug the other direction, intersected into the story of a man He did not know, and Jesus here, enters His life. From Mark’s Gospel we see that His children then know of Jesus because of the change of trajectory that day has for Simon. A total transformation from the day Simon had planned.

“On the Road to the Cross”

Citation: Burkhart, Rob. On the Road to the Cross. Abingdon, 2017.

In preparation for this study, I have been reading through a book called, On the Road to the Cross by Rob Burkhart. He provides a fictional story of what the people could have been experiencing or feeling in the moments of Holy Week and then talks about some of the history behind their part in Holy Week.

I am going to share part of it for your consideration: “Simon had no idea where they were going or how far he would have to carry a dying man’s cross. But he knew better than to ask for help or complain. It was a long, difficult walk through the streets and up the winding path to the top of the hill He had heard of this area-the place of the skull, Golgatha. The merchant dropped the cross where he was told, stepped back, and took in the scene. He took a couple more steps back to blend into the crowd. He watched in horror as the soldiers stripped the prisoners of their clothing and dignity and forced them to lie naked on the crosses. The three-man execution teams worked quickly and efficiently. They’d clearly done this before, many times. It didn’t take long. Neat. Efficient. Roman! Then they gathered up their tools and sat in a small circle near the edge of the killing ground and gambled. (Burkhart, 127).”

What an image. Simon is carrying the cross of someone he does not know who they are and then they are then thrown into the story. He most likely stays to see the aftermath of the man who carried His cross. He sees Jesus’ last breath and the man he just interacted with, was gone.

Questions to Consider

So, what about us? What does the story of Simon teach us as people? There is a lot we can learn from the man of Simon and his story. The phrase that comes to my mind is “Take Up Your Cross”. It reminds me of another verse from Luke 9:23 when Jesus states: Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” To be Jesus’s followers, we cannot be specters of our lives or our stories. We are called to live a life of conviction and commitment to God. It will be unknown, involve risk, and God will do the unexpected to transform us.

While we will never be asked to carry our Savior’s physical cross as Simon was asked to do, we are asked of God to carry a spiritual cross. As we encounter Christ in our lives, it is important to find ways to engage deeper in the things going on in our lives. I believe the story of Simon begs us to ask some questions of ourselves...

1. What are things that we are doing that take our focus away from God? How do they blur our vision?
2. How do your expectations blind you from seeing what God is doing?
3. What situations in your life look more like a trial than an opportunity? How did God use them?
4. How has God changed the directions (your plans) on you?
5. What does it mean for you to be more engaged in your faith?
As Simon’s life was completely changed the day he encountered Christ in a very unexpected way, he was also asked to do something difficult and bold. Christ asks the same of us. On that cross, He bore our shame and suffering. He took everything we have done wrong or will ever do and forgave us. But, then rose again and fulfilled scripture. Now, He comes into our lives through the Holy Spirit and engages with us in (sometimes) very unexpected ways. We have the opportunity to rise to the challenge and see what God is calling us to do. We are to take up our cross and follow Him daily. How can we live out an authentic and involved life each day? How do we pass on our faith to those around us like Simon did with His sons? How do we share the exciting story of Jesus changing our lives from the inside out?

Simon’s story only has a few verses to show for the impact that God had on His life. But, we too, have the chance to live out our faith in an active and present way just as Simon did.