

March 25, 2016

Good Friday reflection on "Simon of Cyrene"

My name is Simon, Our family is from North Africa near the Mediterranean Sea in the city of Cyrene. My wife and two young sons came with me when I crossed the sea and we settled in Israel just a few miles outside the big city of Jerusalem. We were quite poor and stories back in Cyrene of day labor jobs available in Jerusalem motivated me to bring my family to this very different country.

I want to tell you what happened to me yesterday. I was out working in the fields very early. My sons Alexander and Rufus were with me. We decide to come into the walled city in late morning to stop at the merchants for food. Some kind of holy feasts was underway and I thought my sons would like to see all the activity.

They need to get to know these people and learn a little of their language and customs.

As we entered the city through the great stone gateway I saw a noisy crowd coming toward us. The passageway between the stone buildings is rather narrow and I wasn't sure how we could get by them. It was much worse than I thought.

As we drew nearer the crowd I saw Roman soldiers beating a man who was on the ground. Even from a distance he looked a messblood all over his head.

Then it happened. Two of the Roman soldiers bolted toward me and grabbed me and pulled me toward this bloody man on the ground. I looked around at my sons. Some ladies saw them and pulled them over into a protected corner between buildings.

As the Romans dragged me I protested that I had not done anything wrong and tried to resist them. They didn't listen or they didn't understand me. I saw that a very heavy wood cross had probably brought this man to the ground and now they were lifting the cross and dragged it over toward me. They insisted that I carry it.

I didn't do anything wrong , but the Romans were in a mean mood and forced me to lift the cross. I began to fear what they might do to me next. Then the thought hit me that this was probably a Roman public crucifixion.

They pulled the bloody man to his feet and forced him ahead of me, and used their whips to drive both of us forward.. I saw his face for a second and realized that he had a twisted cap of thorns on his head.

I had heard that they were cruel but this was frighteningly sadistic.

What had this man done?

Who was he?

The cross was very heavy , old and worn, probably used before for other executions.

The stone pavement was very rough and I had to look down continually to avoid stumbling under the weight. What would they do to me?

Then I saw something that sent a shudder of fear through me.

I could see the man's footprints on the stones as he struggled ahead of me.

Bloody footprints.

There were patches of blood seeping through his rough cloak.

He must have been beaten him terribly all over.

Who was he?

What had he done to deserve this?

I experienced a feeling of compassion for him. Nobody deserved this treatment.

And the crowd was jeering him and harassing this poor man.

He fell once more and I tried with one arm to help him up. I felt the Roman whip across my back, but I held on to him.

As he struggled up he looked at me.

It was a beautiful look of gratitude and friendship.

I will always remember his face, bloody yet saying thank you to me.

If I could have helped him even more I would have.

My fear for my own safety passed and was replaced by contempt for the Romans and their cruelty, and contempt for many in the crowd that were jeering this man.

How could this man have done anything to deserve this.

A look like his cannot come from an evil person.

As he staggered along I realized that he was too weak to have ever carried this cross up the grade we were on. I could hardly handle it myself. And I had the muscle from my many years as a heavy laborer.

We reached a somewhat level area at the top of the grade.

They ordered me to throw the cross on the ground. It fell with a tremendous thud.

The soldiers forcefully pushed me away and ordered me to leave. I knew what would come next,
I had heard about crucifixion from others but had not seen one.

I was torn, I wanted to leave quickly before the Romans could change their minds and do something to me. They were in a violent mood.
But I **even more** wanted to stay and find out something about this man.

I stayed , not too close, and searched for someone who could tell me something.
I asked one woman and she said he was named Jesus and came from Galilee and had done some wonderful things for many people.

I could not watch what they did next. I heard the sharp clang hammer on the iron nails. And then a great thud when the cross dropped into the furrow in the rock.

Then I turned toward him and heard the most unbelievable words I have ever heard.
This man spoke from his cross, "Father, forgive them, for they don not know what they are doing."
How could he forgive them? But he did !

This was a great man who was being put to death.

I could not witness anymore.
As I started to leave the women who had told me about him moved toward the cross with a few others.

They gathered there beneath his cross.
At least some in this crowd knew the truth about him.
I was determined to learn more about him as time passes.

Now I feel it was an honor to have helped this man Jesus.
Last night I told my wife and sons about this Jesus
I'm going to search for any friends of and learn about him.