**LENT FOR ALL NATIONS:**

**Simon the Cyrene and the Khan Brothers**

**Matthew 27:27-32**

**Wednesday of the Fourth Week in Lent**

**Trinity Lutheran Church**

**Springfield, Missouri**

**25 March *Anno Domini* 2020**

**Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**Our 2020 sermon series, “Lent For All Nations,” continues in context with this Service’s Scripture reading from Matthew 27, beginning at verse 27:**

 ***Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s headquarters,***

 ***and they gathered the whole battalion before Him. And they stripped Him and***

 ***put a scarlet robe on Him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it***

 ***on His head and put a reed in His right hand. And kneeling before Him, they***

 ***mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they spit on Him and***

 ***took the reed and struck Him on the head. And when they had mocked Him,***

 ***they stripped Him of the robe and put His own clothes on Him and led Him***

 ***away to crucify Him. As they wen out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon***

 ***by name. They compelled this man to carry His cross.***

**This Lent we are taking a journey through many foreign lands by listening to stories of people from all nations. We have heard gripping stories of harrowing voyages across the seas and will hear other stories about refugees fleeing for their lives. The stories may start in Pakistan or Germany, Japan, or Mexico, but they end in places like Detroit and St. Louis, Bakersfield (California) and Queens (New York). Each of these stories points us to people from all nations who live in our very own neighborhoods, who go to school with our kids, and who share neighboring cubicles with us at work. In this sermon series, we’ve set aside immigration law and all the complicated and messy politics of the situation and instead we’re turning our attention to the New Testament which has a lot to say to us about people from all nations and what the Gospel means for them and for us. By looking at people of all nations in the New Testament, we are better equipped to live with and love in Jesus’s name our neighbors from all nations.**

**Brothers and sisters in Christ, today is not the first time you have heard Jesus’ call to take up your own cross and follow Him. And yet like Peter and the other disciples how quickly and easily we forget that being a baptized believer following after Jesus really means carrying our crosses is about more than just living as Christians; it is about enduring suffering, about the challenges that come with our stations in life, and about sharing our hope in Christ with other persons. For example, if your classmates at school or your boss at work or your neighbor down the street finds out that you are a Christian, and they don’t like Christians, or they have a jaded view of Christians sharing their faith with other people, they may**

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**make your life even more challenging. Maybe because you are a follower of Jesus you get made fun of or you don’t get that promotion or you get shunned from the neighborhood block party. Maybe it would be risky for you to reach out to the immigrant family next door or to offer support to the Christian congregation down the street that is clearly made up of people like you.**

**Jesus’ first disciples also needed repeated calls to carry their crosses. There are lots of times in the Gospels where Jesus’ disciples completely lost sense of what it meant to follow Jesus. For example, in Matthew chapter ten, Jesus calls His disciples to go to the lost sheep of Israel to tell them the kingdom of God is near. As He is teaching them about their calling, Jesus says, “whoever does not take his cross and follow Me.” And yet when the Pharisees are offended at Jesus’ words, the disciples forget all about carrying the cross of Jesus. They forgot that Jesus had predicted that crosses would come for those who share the Good News of the kingdom of God with people. A few chapters later in Matthew sixteen, Peter confesses Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. And yet, Peter forgets about what Jesus had said earlier. Peter forgot Jesus’ words about carrying the cross. When Jesus reiterated that He was going to Jerusalem and would be killed and raised, Peter says ‘no way! This will never happen!’ And so our Lord scolds and then once again lovingly instructs Peter and the other disciples that following Him meant that they would have to take up their cross and follow Him.**

**As the Gospel of Matthew brings us as readers to his depiction of the actual crucifixion, we hear about the most unlikely person who would end up carrying a cross, Jesus’ cross! After Jesus had been falsely tried and unfairly tortured, it was time for Him to carry His cross to Calvary. This would have been the time, the best opportunity for Jesus’ disciples to stand up, rally around Him, stand strong with Him, and to demand that they all, too, would be crucified along with their Lord and Teacher. And yet, the disciples are nowhere to be found. And yet, the disciples are nowhere to be found. They had fled. When the time and opportunity came, only a little-known man from Cyrene, a coastal town of North Africa, was there and carried Jesus’ cross for the briefest of moments. But Jesus was finally crucified on Golgotha with no disciples at His side, it really was true what Jesus had previously said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” Only Jesus and He alone could and would die for His people. The King of God’s Kingdom carried His own cross for many He would welcome to be His people.**

**And, you, my friends, are among those people He has welcomed. The Lord took up His cross and was crucified for you. He died so that you might live. He ransomed you. He purchased and won you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. And He didn’t do this with gold or silver, but with His own holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. And he did all this so that you could be His own and so that you might live under Him in His kingdom. Time and time again, throughout your life as you know, the Holy Spirit has called you by this**

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**Gospel to return to Jesus. Return to Christ’s cross. Return to carrying Christ’s cross.**

**Which brings us back to a deeper consideration of the man who carried Jesus’ cross, the man named Simon from Cyrene. He was perhaps the least likely man in the crowd that day to carry Jesus’ cross, and yet perhaps when it mattered most, Simon was the only person to do what Jesus would require all His people to do. Matthew specifically wants us to know that the Simon who carried Jesus’ cross was not just any Simon. He was from Cyrene. Cyrene describes Simon’s hometown, but more than that it represents the people to whom Simon belonged. The odd thing about Cyrene was that it was a place of Jewish, Greek, and Roman influence. Simon seems to be the kind of Person Jesus had in mind when at the end of Matthew’s Gospel He said, “Go and make disciples of all nations.” Simon was an “all nations” kind of guy. Simon is a Jewish name, so he was most likely at least half Jewish. But he may have also been a Greek, or maybe a Roman citizen. Such national diversity was a problem for the Pharisee purist, and they would have deemed carrying the cross an unclean act. But it is Simon, not them, who ends up modeling the disciple of Jesus who carries a cross and follows his Lord.**

**Let me introduce you to this week’s special missionaries who live with us in the present tense—the Khan (K-H-A-N) brothers. Khurran and Farukh grew up in a Christian family in Pakistan. They were raised in a comfortable home and taught to be good business men. They both aspired to be engineers, and they received a good education in their home country. Though they were in the minority as Christians in a majority Muslim country, when they were growing up and beginning their career, there was peace and harmony among Christians and Muslims. Then in the 1970s, after the Soviet Union’s invasion of the Middle East, the majority Muslim rule turned from moderate to fundamentalist, extreme and militant. Farrukh and Khurram fled to Saudi Arabia and found work in an American oil company. They were allowed to live openly in Saudi Arabia as long as they did not do one thing. They could not share their beliefs with anyone who was not Christian. While they were there, they came under the influence of Lutheran missionaries, who taught them an emphasis in Christian doctrine they had never heard—that one’s obedience and good works had nothing to do with the assurance of salvation; that one was saved purely by the grace of God through His free gift of faith in Jesus. One layman even smuggled in a copy of Luther’s Small Catechism. That act of taking a catechism and sharing it to cross cultural boundaries so that the Khans could learn the Good News was most certainly, in Saudi Arabian religious law, a carrying of the cross. Through this bold witness, the Khan brothers came to the conclusion that they wanted to change careers and become missionaries themselves!**

**The Khans moved to Canada and then to the United States, where they began a ministry called People of the Book Lutheran Outreach. You may have heard about it by its acronym PABLO, a ministry with an office in St. Louis, a ministry supported by our own mission offerings to Synod. Today, many, many Muslims**

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**have become Christians because of the witness of Farurukh and Khurram Khan.**

**The Gospel calls people of all nations, even the most unlikely of people to us, people like Pakistanis in Saudi Arabia, to pick up their crosses and to follow the call of Christ to share the Gospel with all nations. During this Lenten season we have heard stories of missionaries who have come from all over the world, some with the most unlikely of stories, to share Jesus in America. Let us like them fix our eyes on Jesus and pray for the courage and zeal to follow His will, be in His Word, and to share His ultimate and unlimited supply of the Vaccine of Salvation, which alone can cure the deadliest of all threats—the Virus of sin, death, and Satanic poisons.**

**Amen.**

