

**Rev. Mike Cole**  
**Providence Presbyterian Church**  
**Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**June 28, 2026**  
**Genesis 21:8-21; Matthew 10:24-39 & 27:32**

**"Stepping out of the Crowd"**

We have gotten so accustomed to hearing the names of some of the great people of faith that we have forgotten how ordinary or even below average they were when chosen by God. Abraham and Sarah were ancient when God chose them to be father and mother to a nation. Isaac and Rebekah played unbelievable favoritism between their twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob was a scalawag with no scruples. Moses was a reluctant, stuttering, murderer. David was the smallest and youngest of all his brothers. Solomon was the child of an illicit love affair between David and Bathsheba. That's just a sampling from the Old Testament.

The New Testament is no different. Jesus chose four ordinary fishermen, a tax collector, a misguided zealot, and six other nobodies as his inner circle. St. Paul was a murderer of early believers. St. Mark was thought by some to be a coward. The list of average or "little" people God chose to use in awesome ways just goes on and on. Based on God's choice of followers, we would have to conclude that the Bible is big on little people.

In today's sermon, I'm going to cast a spotlight on one character who barely gets a mention in scripture. This person walks upon the stage of scripture for one verse and then recedes into the background. He is a primary reason why the Bible sounds so realistic and believable.

Our lives are full of little people who touch our lives in various ways. In fact, we are little people for other people. Most of us are not going to be famous and we're not going to make it to the cover of Time Magazine. Which is why it is so intriguing to us to watch God choose little person after little person sometimes to do some very big things. Scriptural evidence abounds that God loves doing big things through ordinary little people like us.

Today, I'm going to look at Simon. You might think immediately that I'm speaking of Simon Peter, the one Jesus referred to as "The Rock." But I'm talking about another Simon who doesn't show up in the story of Jesus until the very end - Simon of Cyrene. We're going to spend a few moments on the glimpse we get of Simon in this one verse from Matthew,

chapter 27, verse 32: "As they were marching (Jesus) out, they came upon a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; this man they compelled to carry his cross."

That's it. That's all Matthew tells us about Simon. But let me tell you why I think Simon is there in scripture. Simon is there for us. He is there for us in our better moments of discipleship.

Here's what I mean. There was Simon, just a face in the crowd. He had probably shown up that day on the sidewalk in Jerusalem just to see what all the ruckus was about. Maybe he was one of the pilgrims who had journeyed a long way from his little town to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover. Matthew really doesn't tell us anything about him, his background or even his motives. There is no indication that he had any particular intentions of getting mixed up with Jesus. All he was doing was standing on the side of the road, watching the parade go by.

And some parade it was. At the head was Jesus, carrying a huge wooden cross. Jesus had been nearly beaten to death, a beating that killed many other hearty men. Now, in one last act of humiliation, Jesus was forced to drag his own cross up to Golgotha, the place of the Skull, while mocking, jeering crowds taunted him.

Then, having suffered the whippings and the weight of the cross for so long, Jesus stumbled. A Roman soldier reached into the crowd and pulled out Simon from Cyrene and ordered him to take up Jesus' cross. And he did. That's all we know about Simon, but it is all we need to know.

Why? Because many of us fit this pattern of discipleship. I realize that there are some people who choose to follow Jesus after making a long, thoughtful study of Jesus' teachings as compared to the other world's religions. But in my experience, people like that are rare. And I suppose that there are some people who, upon reading scripture or hearing a great sermon become convicted of some Christian duty that needs doing. But also, in my experience, such people are rare.

Most of us get to be a disciple almost without a conscious decision. We are just standing on the sidewalk, minding our own business, watching the parade go by, when someone (or maybe the Holy Spirit) reaches out and tells us to take up Jesus' cross. That's exactly what happened to Simon of Cyrene. He had come to see what all the fuss was about. Then, in what some people would call a coincidence, but others with spiritual wisdom would call a "God-incidence," a Roman soldier looked toward the crowd of Jews and said, "You standing there, come over here and drag this cross the rest of the way. And be quick about it or we'll find a cross for you, too."

And Simon stepped out of the crowd and helped Jesus carry his cross. We might have thought that Jesus' disciples would have been there to help. After all, in the upper room they had promised to stick by him no matter what. But when the going got rough, they were roughly gone. There was no one to help Jesus bear his cross up Calvary except this stranger, Simon of Cyrene.

Here is Simon, someone who, as far as we know, never heard Jesus preach or teach, carrying the cross that Jesus had told his followers they would need to be prepared to carry. He took up the cross of Jesus as if it were his own. I'll bet that there are some here today who know what that means - those who may not have been all that clear about scripture or personal beliefs, and yet, who find themselves today carrying Jesus' cross - ministering to others through a prayer chain, visiting the homebound, sponsoring a youth group or seminarian, serving as a worship leader or liturgist, singing in the choir, serving as an elder or deacon, volunteering with the Parker Task Force or Parker Senior Center.

You see, that's how God chooses to choose us. The Lord plucks us out of a crowd when we are minding our own business and calls on us to mind His business. Our part of minding His business may be small, but it is significant. God wouldn't ask us to do it if it didn't need doing.

God uses ordinary little people like you and me to make a big difference by doing lots of little things for Him. So, don't be surprised the next time you're just minding your own business when the Holy Spirit grabs you by the collar and says, "Here, help Jesus carry this cross."

In fact, I think the Spirit may have just spoken to someone, perhaps you. The question is, are you going to step out of the crowd to carry this cross?  
In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen