

April 2, 2021  
Good Friday  
The Rev. Keri T. Aubert  
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

Isaiah 52:13-53:12  
Psalm 40:1-14  
Ephesians 1:3-10  
John 18:1-19:42

*[The Epistle is a substitute recommended by Dan Joslyn-Semiatkoski and the Diocese of Texas, part of broader revisions to the Good Friday liturgy intended to address anti-Semitism.]*

Back in 2005, during Lent of my second year of seminary, volunteers from my class created a DIY installation of the Stations of the Cross. The organizers set an overall physical route that wound both inside and outside the seminary chapel, with each station assigned a particular area. There were no other guidelines or requirements.

I don't think there was an artist in the group, but the stations were creative, thoughtful, and thought-provoking. Most related their pieces of the passion story to then-current events and/or social justice concerns. Thinking even then that I might one day want to remember them, I took photographs.

My friends Dina and Sabeth signed up for Station 5: The Cross is Laid on Simon of Cyrene. The area assigned for it was a back exterior wall of the chapel, essentially a large expanse of plain brick. The first time I walked through the complete stations, I rounded the corner of the building and was brought up short. Here's what I saw:



Again, this is Station 5: The Cross is Laid on Simon of Cyrene. As you can see, it's quite simple. On that red brick wall, they used yellow tape to spell out in giant letters the words, "Why me?"

Remember, Simon is a passer-by whom the soldiers compel to carry Jesus' cross. He's a bystander who gets drawn into the action. When I imagine what becomes of him, I can reach only one conclusion: the events of the day will change him forever. To put it another way, once that cross is laid on Simon, he is never truly able to lay it down.

I suppose I should acknowledge here that Simon of Cyrene is mentioned in the Passion accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke; we heard of him from Mark on Sunday. As you might have noticed, he's not mentioned in the Passion account of John, the one we just heard. Still, I'm sticking with Simon, because I see him as stand-in for other passers-by on that first Good Friday. I even see him as a stand-in for passers-by on the two thousand Good Fridays since.

You may have already figured out where I'm going with all of that. This week, the top national news finally shifted slightly away from the pandemic. That's because it needed to focus on the trial of Derek Chauvin, which began on Monday. Chauvin is, of course, the former Minneapolis police officer charged with the murder of George Floyd. I honestly don't know how anyone can preach Good Friday this year without mentioning George Floyd.

I expect that we've all long known generally what happened, but the details being revealed are making it much more vivid. Much of the testimony this week has been from passers-by—people who just happened along—who saw what was happening and tried—unsuccessfully—to intervene. It has been heart-breaking to watch. They couldn't have known what would happen that day. They couldn't have known then how events would play out. They couldn't have known that video of their testimony would be available around the globe and for all time. A burden was laid on each of them that day. I wonder whether they will ever be able to lay it down.

Most of you already know that I am skeptical of the more usual theologies of the cross. Jesus died for *my* sins? I just don't know. The worse that I have done simply does not seem to justify a fraction of what Jesus suffered. On the other hand, what I do believe is this: God experienced the worst abuse that one human can inflict upon another. Therefore God is with those who suffer now, and that's where we ought to be, too.

We Christians learn that Jesus expects his disciples to pick up their crosses and follow him. He says a version of that in every one of the four gospels. When those words were written down, being a Christ-follower was dangerous. For most Christians, things are different now. Therefore I wonder whether we should be worrying less about carrying our own crosses, and more about carrying Jesus' cross—which is to say, the crosses of those who are still suffering. We might not have chosen those crosses, but they have most certainly been laid on us.

Why me? When I begin to think about that question, I hear it filled with petulance and resentment. Why me? That would be my five-year-old self speaking. But when I sit with it, I hear it differently, and it sounds more like curiosity or resolve. Why me? Here I am, this cross is in my hands, what might I be able to do with it?