

Jesus Falls for the First Time Carrying the Cross

Scripture: Luke 23:13 - 25

Third Sunday of Lent 2024

The third Station of the Cross is 'Jesus falls for the first time'. Here Jesus shows us that being heroic does not mean staying on one's feet at all costs. Being heroic means getting up again after falling and starting off again on the road chosen.

Human beings will never resign themselves to stay flat on the ground. I can remember at a high school football game a friend of my son who played football boy was involved in a very hard hit and after the hit, he laid flat on the ground and did not move. His dad stood up and said 'Scott (the boy's name) must be really hurt because he is not getting up!' The father immediately ran onto the field to check on his son. He was knocked unconscious! Humans do not resign themselves to staying flat on the ground.

Like Jesus, we will get up again. We will pick ourselves up. We will pick up our cross and keep searching for a promised land of total liberation.

Jesus fell under the weight of his cross. He might have fallen into the gutter or slouched into a doorway on skid row. He does not look much like God there. He does not look much like God when he fell into the dirt on the way to Calvary.

The crowds look on as Jesus carries his cross. They look on Jesus with disdain at this man whom they see as a sinner and who has been condemned to die by the authorities.

The cross Jesus is carrying was believed to be the whole cross. It is believed that Jesus carried the upright part of the cross called the stipes and the horizontal member of the cross called the cross bar that people were tied or nailed to. There have been some movies or shows that show Jesus only carrying the cross bar.

No matter what Jesus carried, it was heavy and he was exhausted from being tortured and beaten. Jesus falls for the first time.

Have you ever fallen or stumbled in life? Think back in your life, have you ever fallen? Have you ever stumbled and needed help from another person? Can you remember who helped you?

I have felt some responsibility to stand up against hatred and injustice. I have felt the call to preach about love and compassion. I have felt that as a nation we have lost the feeling of empathy for others different than us. Empathy is the ability to put oneself into the shoes of another. We have lost that! But I did not want to hurt anybody's feeling so I took a weak stand against hatred. I bit my tongue, I tempered my words, and try not to be seen politically.

So when confronted with folks who are mean or overly critical, I tried to remember that they are still a growing people as followers of Christ and not yet perfect. When confronted by people who are misinformed or uninformed, that did not stop me from talking about God's love and Jesus' compassion.

Folks in this world are just sinners, still incomplete, and it is the calling of the pastor to lead them to greener pastures and to bring them to the still waters. It is the calling of the pastor and shepherd to help restore their souls. But I have to share this with you – I feel I have done a dis-service to my calling.

Each of us is called to be the exact person God created us to be. And yes – we can be more than we would ever be on our own, if we seek out Christ, to do His will, to be His servant, and to live the life for which God has already drawn up the blueprint.

Remember, you are not your own; you were brought at a price. Christ paid for our sins so that we might touch others with the same forgiveness and hope that Jesus extends to us. Christ wants us to ring the bell, reach the summit, and to become more than we could ever imagine ourselves to be. We achieve that by giving up our lives; by giving up our lives to God's personal leading and direction.

We are fortunate at this church to have men and women to look up to, to help lead us, and to be examples for us. Each of us need to work at being a leader, to lead others to Christ. Work at being a positive force for prayer, hope, love, compassion, and forgiveness. Work at being a Disciple of Christ.

Like the crowd along the road to Calvary, we often have only condemnation and rejection for those we see as sinners. We judge them without knowing about their trials and we crown them with thorns. We yell vial names at them and call them rapist and thieves. We break up their families and call this policy just.

Do we even suspect the part we might have played in knocking them down? What can we do to help them?

There are burdens of injustice, racism, and words of hatred running rapid in our society. How can we help stop this?

It is often easy to see the image of a saint. Often we picture ourselves as saints. But we need during this Lenten season to see ourselves as sinners and we need to place in our hearts the love and compassion that Jesus showed to all who followed him.

We have the opportunity to stand strong against hatred. We need your voice today! When God identifies a need, we must stand strong! When Christ calls us to stand up against hatred, we need to stand up! We need to stand strong when any child is taken from a parent. We need to stand strong when making fun of a person brings laughter to a crowd. We need to stand strong against hatred wherever that hatred comes from!

Stand up strongly against hatred! And if you fall or stumble, Christ will be there to help you!

Let us pray:

O Compassionate God, as we walk through this day, help us to see the opportunities to stand strong against hatred. Let us make a difference and stand up against hatred in what form it takes. Let us stand up against words that divide us. Let us stand strong against speech that blames our problems on a particular group of people. Let hatred not be part of our being, in Christ name we pray - AMEN.