

## **Jesus Falls for the Third and Final Time Carry the Cross**

Scripture: Luke 23:27 – 31

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Let us review our sermon series for Lent. The series has dealt with the cross and Jesus falling on his way to Calvary. Two weeks ago we looked at Jesus falling for the first time. The message was that falling is not the heroic act, it is getting back up that is! Jesus was carrying his cross of condemnation and he falls the first time and picks himself back up. Many of us have fallen in some way, but we need to pick ourselves back up. Last week we look at Jesus falling for the second time and Simon of Cyrene being ordered by a Roman guard to assist Jesus in carrying the cross. Simon was a visitor in Jerusalem and knew nothing about Jesus but yet he helped Jesus with his burden and used his strength to carry the cross for Jesus. Many times in our lives we need help from our Simon's of Cyrene or we have helped others with their burdens. At the beginning of our service during our prelude you saw of those we have helped and all those who have helped us in our time of need.

Let us continue our sermon series as Jesus struggled on his walk to Calvary carrying his cross of condemnation. People along the way were moved by the sight of Jesus. One of the women who lined the route Jesus took carrying his cross was named Veronica. She was so moved by the sight of Jesus carrying his cross that she courageously moved out from the crowd and with a towel, she wiped Jesus' face. The blood and sweat from Jesus' face came off on the towel. She was rewarded with the image of his face. The image of Jesus' face was transferred to the towel.

It was a suffering face which was disfigured with wounds. It was bloodied face which was dripping blood. Yet this is the image of Jesus. This is the image Jesus chose to leave with us!

What an image! Our Lord and Savior bleeding and in pain. His face full of blood and sweat. Would you be like Veronica and wipe Jesus' face or would you turn your eyes away unable to see the sight?

Today the visible face of Christ, the Church, stands before us still wounded and disfigured. The church, disfigured by its own sins of abuse of power and wealth. The Church, creased with wounds of hurt and betrayal. The Church, bearing scars of our past and present. The Church, with sexual abuse of children within it.

Let us look upon the Church, and let us pray for healing of the sins of our church. Let us approach our church with the courage of Veronica so that we may wash the face of Christ and clean the church from any disfigurements of our sins. Let us bring healing to the scars that hide the beauty of the church. Let us have faith to continue to build your Church as a visible sign of your love and compassion.

The women of Jerusalem are lined up along the road to Calvary. The women are weeping at the sight of Jesus. They are crying because of the suffering Jesus has endured. Jesus sees the women in distress and he breaks his silence for the first time on his journey carrying his cross of condemnation. Jesus says – *Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children!*

Let us look at Jesus and listen to his message for us today.

- \*Weep for the children who are abused.
- \*Weep for the women who are victimized.
- \*Weep for the men and women who suffer from the tyranny of prejudice and nationality that prevents them from being loved.
- \*Weep for the young who cannot find a job or a way of life.
- \*Weep for the old who have been forgotten.
- \*Weep for the people who are starving in the shadow of abundance.
- \*Weep for people who are homeless or in exile or seeking refuge.
- \*Weep for all of them!

May we open our hearts to the suffering of all people in our world. May we have a generosity of spirit to help all those and may we recognize their pain. And may we have the courage to challenge the systems that place intolerable burdens on them and the compassion to support them.

Jesus is broken and exhausted physically and emotionally and Jesus falls with his cross of condemnation for the third and final time. Jesus was lying on the ground, totally exhausted! Jesus now must decide – does he get up once more or does he just stop and give up?

Jesus rises once and with all his power and will, Jesus continues on his journey. Jesus shows us that we can go on, even if nobody else thinks that it is possible.

Many in our world today feel that they are at that moment of finally falling and not getting up. Many in our world today feel that the burdens they carry are way too much for them. They cannot bear any more! They feel crushed by the weight of their cross and they feel unable to get up! They feel unable to go on!

In Jesus we find our hope and our encouragement. This third time that Jesus fell should remind us that even in our moment of complete helplessness, we can stand up again. Even in moments of experiencing despair, we can stand again. Even on our way to our Calvary, Jesus is with us and he is our strength!

When our strength fails, when our hope fades, and when our spirit grows weary; that is when we will put our faith in Jesus Christ. May we show Jesus' love in our words and actions. May we bring comfort to those who feel that they are too tired to continue. In their moments of feeling meaningless, depressed, and in despair, may we through the power of Jesus bring them comfort.

Let us pray:

O God, we adore you and praise you. We adore and praise because of Jesus and his cross which has redeemed the world.

AMEN.