Carl Thrun

Luke 23: 26

THE FOURTH WEDNESDAY IN LENT:

Intro. The VIA DOLOROSA -- the Way of Sorrows. As we follow Jesus on this final journey to the cross, we certainly see a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Here is our Savior -- betrayed, denied, forsaken, ridiculed, scourged, condemned. Truely this Jesus was, as our theme for these Lenten meditations states, a lover of sinners. Because of sinners He moves along toward Calvary exhausted by his night-long ordeal, bruised by the soldiers' whips, weakened by loss of blood, and carrying the heavy wooden cross upon his shoulders. His shoulders sagged, his knees buckled, his breath grew short -- He could not carry it all the way by Himself.

I. Just then Simon of Cyrene came along. He was on a pilgrimage to the Passover. He it was who was chosen when Jesus staggered and fell to bear the cross. This was no mere chance happening. It was all part of God's eternal design for Simon's life. Simon met Jesus and so was enabled to carry the cross. Had there been no meeting, there would have been no cross to bear. The crosses that you and I are called to bear befall us because we have met Jesus, because we have embraced Him in faith as our Savior.

II. Meaning of the cross. Not every unpleasantness that comes our way, not every pain we bear, not every hardship we suffer, can rightly be called a cross. A cross is that which we must suffer because we have met Christ. It is the price we must pay for being a Christian.

III. Crosses come unexpectedly. Simon had just come to Jerusalem. Suddenly, without understanding why the cross was upon his shoulders. We can never tell, either, when the cross may come to us. Without warning we may feel the heavy burden upon our shoulders.

IV. Crosses come unwantingly. Simon did not bear the cross willingly or cheerfully. He was compelled to bear the cross. It interfered with his plans and put him to unexpected inconvenience. So also crosses which we must bear often interfere with our plans and go counter to our own ideas of what is best for us. Just when we think things are going along smoothly we are very often halted in our tracks and compelled to take up a cross, unforeseen and unwanted. But nevertheless, as in Simon's case God knows best. God leads us ever onward, step by step.

V. When Simon met Jesus, he had to turn about and go in the opposite direction. The direction was OPPOSITE not only in the physical sense, but also in the spiritual sense. His meeting with Jesus changed the entire course of his life, for it was through this meeting that he was brought to faith in Christ as his Savior. Had Simon not been compelled to bear the cross, he would not have come to know his Savior. Jesus loved Simon. He was about to die on the very cross which Simon was carrying; yes, He was about to die for Simon and for the whole world.

VI. For Simon the cross became a blessing. So also it is with us. The cross is an evidence of God's love. Even as the cross was required to draw Simon to Christ, so also it is required to draw us to Christ. The cross makes us humble, it turns us in a new direction. It turns us away from pride, vanity, lust and points ut toward Calvary and the redeeming Christ.