



**APRIL 21, 2019**

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*Pastor David Gardner*

Most of the time when I write the devotional, I have a theme for the Sunday Sermon, and I try to utilize the theme with (hopefully) practical applications. Some of the time, a devotional is based upon items and research that was for the sermon but edited out...not because the material was lacking. I think sermons that are 12-20 minutes are good. I think sermons that are 25 to 40 minutes are too long.

This devotional is background material on the resurrection story. Rarely do I do an Easter sermon based on all 4 Gospel accounts. Lori Hatcher writes for [www.crosswalk.com](http://www.crosswalk.com) in an article entitled, "5 Characters of the Easter Story You are Probably Forgetting":

Every Easter drama and passion play has headliners. So does the biblical account of the Easter story—Oscar-worthy leading men and women who held up-front roles in the story of Jesus' crucifixion.

But behind the headliners stand characters who played significant, if under-recognized parts. I'd like to spotlight five men and women we often forget when we study the Easter story.

## **1. Simon of Cyrene**

Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention Simon as the man who carried Jesus' cross to Golgotha. Most criminals were forced to carry their own crosses, but Jesus was apparently too weak from his brutal lashing to be able to carry it. Simon was jerked from the crowd and forced to help him.

Because Cyrene is located in modern-day Libya, some have speculated Simon may have been a dark-skinned black man who had come to worship in Jerusalem for Passover. Many Jews lived in Cyrene at the time, however, so it's more likely he was a dispersed Jew. Mark 15:21 records that Simon had brought his sons, Alexander and Rufus, to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.

Because people from Cyrene were some of the first to place their faith in the resurrected Christ on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:10), many scholars believe that Simon, his sons, and even his wife may have been among those early church members. Romans 16:13 gives us a possible connection. The apostle Paul wrote, "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also, his mother, who has been a mother to me as well."

Considering that Simon probably lifted the blood-spattered cross from Jesus' shoulder onto his own, witnessed his crucifixion, and heard the news of his miraculous resurrection, it's easy to understand why scholars believe Simon may have become a follower of Jesus.

## 2. The Centurion at Jesus' Tomb

We know little about this minor character in the passion of Christ. In ancient Rome, centurion means “captain of 100,” so we know he was a man of power within the Roman government. As a law enforcement officer, he would have seen the dregs of society and also rubbed shoulders with the rich and famous.

During one of his shifts, the centurion witnessed Jesus' tortuous death on the cross. He saw his humanity when he cried out, “I thirst.” He felt his agony when he screamed, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He felt his compassion when he heard Jesus pray, “Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing.”

This man, a formal instrument of Roman justice and punishment, weighed Christ's charges against his character and spoke two sentences: “Truly this was a Son of God,” and “Certainly this was a righteous Man.” Unlike the religious leaders of the time, this pagan soldier recognized what others refused to see—the true human and divine natures of Jesus.

## 3. The Apostle John

When Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, all his disciples forsook him and fled. Gospel accounts later tell us Peter and “another disciple” followed him into the high priest's courtyard (John 18). Some scholars suspect this “other disciple” was John. In the Gospels John is often referred to as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

The Bible also lists John as the only disciple present at Jesus' crucifixion. While the others hid in fear of arrest, John bravely stood beside Jesus' mother as she watched her beloved son die (John 19:26).

From the cross, Jesus spoke to them. “Woman, here is your son,” he said to Mary (John 19:26). “Here is your mother,” he said to John. Scholars agree that with these two statements, Jesus was reassuring his mother that she would be cared for while also bestowing the responsibility for his mother's care upon John. “From that time on,” John 19:27 states, “this disciple took her into his home.”

True love often demands that we put another's welfare above our own. Although John's courage failed in the Garden of Gethsemane, his deep and abiding love for Jesus ultimately caused him to do the right thing. Not only did he stand beside his Friend in his deepest hour of need, he accepted the responsibility to care and provide for his mother for the rest of her life. John, a sometimes-overlooked character, deserves the Best Supporting Actor award for the crucial part he played in the Easter drama.

## 4. Joseph of Arimathea

Joseph, like Nicodemus of John 3, was a secret disciple. The Bible describes him as a member of the Sanhedrin, the judicial body of the Jews. Despite being a “respected member of the council,” (Mark 15:43), Joseph “had not consented to their decision and action” to arrest and prosecute Jesus (Luke 23:50-5). Passion plays sometimes portray Joseph as a cowardly, conflicted man who remains silent when the votes are cast for Jesus' condemnation. Perhaps this is true.

I prefer to give Joseph the benefit of the doubt, assuming he hoped to quietly influence others to recognize Jesus as the Messiah and perhaps even use his prominent position to protect him.

Regardless, Joseph demonstrated great courage after Christ's death. Risking the ridicule of his peers, endangerment of his wealth, and expulsion from the council, he boldly petitioned Pontius Pilate for Christ's body. He purchased a linen shroud, took Jesus' body from the cross, and transported it to his own tomb. There he and Nicodemus quickly anointed the body with burial spices and placed it in Joseph's tomb, “for the Sabbath was drawing on.”

Joseph goes down in the cast of characters as a man who voted his conscience, used his influence for good, and courageously stepped up to do the right thing no matter what it cost him. We'd do well not to forget him.

## 5. Pilate's Wife

It seems odd to end the list of noble yet easily forgotten characters in the Easter story with Pilate's wife, a person we know little about. Unlike her well-known husband, she isn't even named in the Gospels. We can assume, because she was married to a prominent Roman governor, that she was high-born Roman, well educated, and wealthy. With little more than assumptions however, it's best to focus on what she did rather than who she was. On the morning of Jesus' trial, she sent her husband an urgent message, "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him" (Mat. 27:19). Scripture records that Pilate "knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him" (Mat. 27:18) but chose instead to disregard his wife's wise advice.

Like Joseph of Arimathea, Pilate's wife took bold and courageous action against a very powerful man. Women of the Bible website accurately describes her heroic deed: "Pilate's wife is the only recorded person who spoke up against the decision to kill Jesus."

Female in a world where women were devalued, and powerless in her own right, Pilate's wife was used by God to deliver timely advice. Her one-line cameo appearance unequivocally earns her a spot on the list of characters you don't want to forget in the Easter story.

During this season of Lent, why not take time to reread the Easter story with an eye for the marginalized and obscure? I'm confident you'll find other unforgettable characters who will inspire and deepen your appreciation for God's ability to use ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

**God, Your Word is alive, especially so when we put on the sandals of Joseph or John or Pilate's wife. Let our hearts burn with desire to keep Your Word fresh. We ask in the name of the One who came back for us, Jesus. Amen**



Thankful  
Grateful  
and truly  
Blessed

New LED lights in the  
Hallway and Entry

Holy Week Services

Visitors at Easter Service



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**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

- 1 - Dwight Freese
- 1 - Sue Pray
- 12 - Terri Gibson
- 15 - Denise Tinney-Clark
- 16 - Mary Jo Randolph
- 20 - Donna Frye
- 24 - Michelle Rue
- 27 - Tierney Rue Hodges
- 28 - Lauren Frye Merritt

*Happy Anniversary!*

- 2 - David and Jana Gardner



UMW will meet this Thurs April 25<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm.

The Fellowship Meal will be this Sunday April 28<sup>th</sup> at Noon.

Men's Breakfast will be May 5<sup>th</sup> t 8:00 am.

If you are interested in a support weekend for Women who have a relative or friend who is or has been incarcerated please contact Gerry Rawlings for more information about Kairos Outside.



**From Steeple to Street**  
**ST. PAUL'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
**Children's & Youth Celebration**  
**Ages 3-18 (Parents, too)**  
**At the Greens Apartments**  
**(421 S. 27<sup>th</sup> in Duncan)**  
**Tuesday, April 23, 2019**  
**5:30 PM-7:00 PM**



Bringing the Love of Jesus from the pews of St. Paul's United Methodist Church to our neighborhood and community.

**Free hot dogs, hamburgers, games, songs and Jesus loving fun right where you live and play. Join Us!**

# In Our Thoughts & Prayers



Cheryl Johnson and Family – Loss of her mom Iva Johnson  
Family of Ranet Tippens after her Father's death  
Ann Starrett – Dementia and broken Hip. In Memory Care.  
Trish Lister  
James Crow – Cancer  
Parker Bowles - Happiness  
Kay Martin – Dementia and Fell and Broke a Bone  
Family of Peggy Harper  
Sara Riggs – for strength and patience  
Pipkin Family  
Thomas Bradburry – Healing from Cancer  
Carla Johnson – Fracture in her Shoulder  
Jo Ann Pierce – Recovering from Knee Surgery  
Pat Weber – Recovering from Foot Surgery  
Marian Chessmore's sister with Heart issues  
Della Henry – Heart Surgery  
Kathy Allred – Continued prayers for healing and to be healthy  
Marcia Haskins – On going foot sores  
Drew Cole - Cancer  
Junior Brown - Cancer  
Connie Green – Cancer  
Courtney – Continued prayers for the Allred's 11 yr. old grandchild with neurological issues.  
Stacy Mettler – Cancer  
Ann Johnson – Continued prayers for healing on her hip  
Addie McMurrin  
Jason Poorman – (Edith Suiters nephew) Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma  
Karen Gibson – Cancer  
Gary Gibson – Cancer  
Jan Smith – Cancer  
Rebecca's cousin has eating disorder, liver failure and on transplant list  
Kathy Bridges – Cancer  
Joe Perry – Kidney cancer  
Margaret Averre – Throat cancer  
Daniel Whittney – Cancer  
Jennifer Allred – Spinal pain and fibromyalgia  
Melinda Douglas – Lung Cancer