

Sermon / 7 April 2023/ Good Friday/ Worthy/ Rev. David Martin, Deacon at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Albuquerque, NM

Several years ago, before I was ordained, I did my field work at another Episcopal Parish. Their Good Friday liturgy at noon was an outdoor observance of the stations of the cross. The church had a lot of land around it. The stations were set up around the property and the congregation walked a fair distance from station to station.

They had a medium-sized wooded cross that traveled to each station. There was no prepared list of people to carry the cross each time. Someone in the group simply picked it up and carried it to the next designated station.

But after the 5th station, no one who had not carried it before offered to carry the cross. So the same 5 people took up the cross for the remaining 9 stations. There was a crowd of about 30 people there, but only 5 people volunteered to carry the cross.

At the evening service later in the day, I was talking with some parishioners before the liturgy began. I expressed my surprise that so few people had been willing to carry the cross between stations earlier in the day.

A guest of a parishioner quickly said, "Well, I know I'm not worthy to carry Jesus' cross."

We ARE worthy, my friends. You are worthy. Each one of us is worthy.

When I heard "I'm not worthy to carry Jesus' cross", I was dumbfounded. I said nothing that evening, but I couldn't understand why someone would say such a thing.

"I'm not worthy to carry the cross for Jesus."

My first thought was this: What do you mean you aren't worthy? That's the whole point of Good Friday. That's the whole point of Holy Week. Jesus' betrayal, arrest, torture, crucifixion, and eventual resurrection make us all worthy. Don't you get it? Jesus' death makes us worthy. Of course, you are worthy.

We ARE worthy, my friends. You are worthy. Each one of us is worthy.

My second thought was this: What do you mean you aren't worthy? How worthy does one have to be to help someone carry their instrument of torture and death? Jesus was mocked, beaten and then made to carry that heavy cross to his own

crucifixion. Even symbolically, you can't help Jesus with that gruesome task? Of course, you can. Of course, you are worthy.

We ARE worthy, my friends. You are worthy. Each one of us is worthy.

My final thought, later in the evening, was this: What do you mean you aren't worthy? What's going on in your life – what happened in your past – that makes you believe you are not worthy of being with Jesus during the day of his death? Who told you that you are unworthy of Jesus' ultimate act of love for us....for you? Whatever it was....whoever it was.....perhaps it was you who told yourself that you are not worthy....

It's a lie....because

We ARE worthy, my friends. You are worthy. Each one of us is worthy.

Not only is each one of us worthy to carry the cross for Jesus, we are called....we are instructed....to carry our own cross as well. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells his friends, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24)

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell of us a person, Simon of Cyrene, who helped Jesus carry his cross. Granted, we are told he was "compelled" by the Roman soldiers to take up the cross, but he lightened Jesus' load nonetheless. The scriptures give us no details about Simon of Cyrene. I have always thought that Simon represents me – us – as we travel with Jesus from Jerusalem to Golgatha. Simon was worthy – although reluctantly – to carry the cross for Jesus. We are worthy – perhaps reluctantly - as well.

On Tuesday of this week Mother Carolyn, Mother Sylvia, Fr. Christopher, and I attended the annual Chrism mass. At the liturgy, all clergy gather to renew the vows we took at our ordinations. We sang the hymn, "Christ for the World We Sing." I was particularly aware of the third verse:

The world to Christ we bring, with one accord.
With us the work to share, with us reproach to dare,
With us the cross to bear for Christ our Lord.

We sang together that we were going to carry the cross of Christ and take it to the world. Jesus isn't here to take the cross of salvation to the world. We are called to do it.

We ARE worthy, my friends. You are worthy. Each one of us is worthy.

In hindsight, I believe that person who told me they were not worthy to carry the cross for Jesus was actually already doing it. They were carrying Jesus' cross and their own cross as well. They just didn't know it. It was probably an enormous cross they had to bear. It was so heavy and all-consuming; they just thought it was normal. They thought it was part of their life.

I suspect that each one of us feels unworthy from time to time....a lot of the time....all of the time. I know I do. That unworthiness often manifests itself in what is often called "Imposter Syndrome." When others find out who we really are- our faults and our mistakes - we will be exposed and found unworthy of our jobs, our friends, our family....unworthy of love

But as I said before. That is a lie.

We ARE worthy, my friends. You are worthy. Each one of us is worthy.

In our brokenness, we are worthy.

In our addiction, we are worthy.

In our carelessness, ignorance, and mistakes, we are worthy.

In our pain and confusion, we are worthy.

In our joy and happiness, we are worthy.

In our sorrow and grief, we are worthy.

In our misplaced pride, self-satisfaction, and oversized egos, we are worthy.

Just as you are - right here and right now, you are worthy.

Worthy of love and respect from the world.

Worthy of God's love and salvation.

Worthy.

Very soon we will be invited to come forward and venerate the cross. This is an opportunity to get up close and personal with the cross of Jesus – to spend some time reflecting on Jesus' sacrifice for us. You can gaze at it, pray with it, touch it, some people may kiss it or kneel before it to show that we truly understand and are grateful for the salvation given to us through this piece of wood.

And understand and acknowledge that we are worthy of God's love and salvation freely given to us all – today represented by cross of Jesus.

It's the truth.

We ARE worthy, my friends. You are worthy. Each one of us is worthy.