

When your marriage and relationships are tested, remember there will always be a cross. When things go bad on the job, remember there will always be a cross. Whenever something challenging, hurting and troubling happens, remember there will always be a cross. One thing we as black people know a whole lot about is bearing crosses. Through the monstrous evils of slavery, we bore our cross. Through the trauma of Civil War, we bore our cross. Through the disappointment of Reconstruction we bore our cross. Through the insult of Jim Crow, the terror of the Klu Klux Klan we bore our cross. Through the struggles for civil rights, we bore our cross. Through the hypocrisy of modern-day politics, we are still bearing our cross.

But there is an answer to the cross, and that answer is the victory that Jesus Christ gives. Victory over the cross, victory over oppression, victory over injustice, victory over death, victory over the grave, victory over lies, victory over the evil one. Though we be like Simon, forced to carry crosses that are painful to bear, Jesus gives us strength and power to persevere.

St. Matthew A.M.E. Church
Bible Study
Monday, February 23, 2009

St. Mark 15:21 and Romans 16:13

In Paul's letter to the Romans there is a very fleeting reference to a rather obscure person named Rufus. The Apostle Paul describes him as "eminent in the Lord" and to the mother of Rufus who from what Paul says is so close that he considers her as his own mother. To discover who these two people are we need to go back twenty three years from the time the Letter to the Romans was written to an event recorded in the Gospel of St. Mark. (St. Mark 15:21) The gospel records that as Jesus was being led to Calvary bearing His cross that they compelled a passerby, a North African black man by the name of Simon to help Jesus carry His cross. Jesus has been beaten and is exhausted, His stamina is gone, His legs give way and He falls with the weight of the cross falling on top of Him. So they grab Simon and compel Him to bear the cross. We know only two things about Simon. First, that he is from Cyrene a country of Northern Africa which was populated by blacks. Second, we know that he is the father of Alexander and Rufus. Mark is the only gospel that tells us that Simon is the father of Alexander and Rufus. It lets us know that Alexander and Rufus were well known in the early Christian community. This text also lets us know that Rufus mother was Simon's wife. Rufus is probably the younger of the two brothers since Mark mentions Alexander first. Simon of Cyrene is not mentioned in Paul's letter to the Romans, neither is Alexander, this is probably because both have gone home to be with the Lord. It appears that the wife of Simon was a widow now and was being cared for by Rufus, who was her only remaining son.

The presence of Rufus and his mother in the Roman Christian church is highly significant for us who are African American because they are evidence of the prominence and influence of African black's people in the early Christian church. Many people erroneously believe that the black church did not come into existence until the time of slavery in America. The truth is that the black church existed in Africa centuries before Christianity reached the Anglos and Saxons in Europe. In fact, black people were the founders of the oldest Christian church in the world, the Coptic Church of Egypt.

Rufus and his brother were around eleven and twelve years old when their father went from Cyrene to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Whether his wife and children were with him we do not know, but it is clear that Simon was committed to providing spiritual leadership to his family which is evidenced by their involvement in the Roman church years later. Simon was in Jerusalem on a pilgrimage. It turned out to be a crossroads in his life. He would cross paths with Jesus who would not only change his life but that of his family.

In every person's life there is a crossroads. Present at that crossroads is Jesus. What happens at that crossroads is up to each one of us. There will also be a cross. We cannot escape it. When your health takes a turn for the worse, remember there will always be a cross. When a financial crisis occurs in your life, remember there will always be a cross.