

Stations of the Cross

April 10, 2020

This experience will walk you through the final hours of the life of Jesus, beginning with his trial before Pilate and culminating in Christ's atoning death on the cross.

At each of the 8 Stations:

- Read the Scripture passage, pausing to imagine the scene.
- Next, read the brief reflection followed by a prayer. Feel free to add your personal reflections to the prayer, voicing what is taking place in your own heart.

PRAYER:

Lord, as we begin this journey of the Cross, we open our hearts and minds to You. We may be sheltering in place, but we recognize your loving and guiding presence in this very place. Speak into our current life realities. Amen.

Station #1- Pilate condemns Jesus to die

Matthew 27:11-14, 24

Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"You have said so," Jesus replied.

When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer.

Then Pilate asked him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?" But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

Over the past month or so, we are repeatedly told, "Wash your hands to prevent the spread of disease." Pilate washed his hands to prevent a political uprising. For all his power, Pilate could not find the courage to take responsibility and do what was right. Instead, he yielded to peer pressure and chose what was safe.

PRAYER:

Lord, I confess to the times I have not spoken up for others when they needed a voice. There are those around me who feel alone and abandoned. Have I been there for them? Oh, Lord, forgive me for washing my hands of responsibility! Give me the courage to do what is right: to pick up the towel of service, not the towel of safety.

Station #2- Jesus accepts His cross

Matthew 27:27-31

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

What a humiliating ordeal! In addition to the physical pain, how wounding the mockery must have been! Rather than flashing his Kingly power and control, Jesus accepted a different kind of crown.

In Genesis 3 we read of a particularly interesting consequence of mankind's first sin: *"Cursed is the ground because of you.. It will produce thorns and thistles for you."*

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, it was in the Garden of Eden where sin first watered a thorn-producing ground. And now those sin-laced thorns are pressed into your sinless brow. I cringe at the puncturing pain of thorns. And, I cringe at the disgrace you suffered on our behalf. It is not fair; it is not right that the King of kings should be exposed to such demeaning ridicule. Yet, thanks to you, Jesus, your amazing grace redeems our thorned and thistled humanity.

Station #3- Simon helps carry the cross

Mark 15:21

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

I can only imagine the awful weight of that cross Jesus carried. I am not at all surprised to know that Jesus was weary, but I am surprised by how humbly accepted assistance. The all-powerful One, acknowledging his humanness, not allowing pride to hinder help.

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, when I stumble and fall beneath the demanding weights of life, who might you bring into my life to help bear my burden? Am I willing to humbly accept the assistance of others as you did, Jesus? I confess that there are times when my pride wants to say, "I can carry this by myself. I don't need a Simon. I got this." But the truth is that I do need help. From a face-down-in-the-dust place, I swallow pride and accept the help you offer to me through others.

Station #4- Jesus speaks to the women

Luke 23:27-28

A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children."

As Jesus struggled along the road toward that awful place of death, a group of women among the crowd express deep grief at his impending death.

Could it be that the broken, bleeding, and hurting Jesus the women see stumbling along this road of suffering is really a mirror reflecting my own brokenness?

PRAYER:

Lord, I pause to recall the names and faces of people who have wept over me. Thank you, Jesus, for those who have loved me so much that they grieved while watching me struggle through life. The splash of their tears awakens me to dead-end paths.

O Lord, give me the gift of tears to weep for my own failures, for my sins, for the pain I bring to you. And I ask that the accumulation of tears – of others and my own – water a new path of repentance and life.

Station #5- Jesus stripped of his clothes

John 19:23-24

When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."

This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled that said, "They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment."

So this is what the soldiers did.

Standing naked before a crowd, Jesus was stripped of clothes, and stripped of human decency. Vulnerable. Exposed.

I pause for a moment to look at myself, to reflect on the clothes I am wearing right now. My clothes are a sharp contrast to the torn, tattered, blood-stained clothes rudely ripped from the Christ who chose a life of poverty.

PRAYER:

What does it mean to be a follower of you, Jesus? Does it require being stripped of possessions I use to conceal, camouflage, and cover over my vulnerabilities? O Lord, what am I concealing by wearing these clothes of mine?

Forgive me for the ways I hide behind layers of worldly labels. Lord, may I someday stand with a surprising contentment when all gets stripped from me.

Station #6- Jesus is nailed to the cross

Mark 15:25

It was nine in the morning when they crucified him.

Huge, sharp spikes are hammered through Jesus' wrists and feet – he nearly loses consciousness with each swing of the hammer. Now he is raised up and the cross drops with a thud into the ground. Jesus' full weight hangs on those three spikes. For his lungs to take in oxygen, he has to pull himself up on the nails.

Had I been there that day, would I have been able to watch? Would I have looked away?

The Apostle Paul reminds me in his letter to the Galatians: *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

PRAYER:

O, Lord, my emotions are mixed: sorrow, deep sorrow as I consider the pain you endured in my place. And, joy, unbounded joy as I consider the freedom I now have in you.

Station #7- Jesus cares for His mother

John 19:25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Jesus is essentially saying to the disciple John (named here as "the disciple whom he loved), *"I am no longer going to be physically present to love and care for my mother, so I am asking YOU to love her as I have loved her."*

In his physical absence, Jesus invites us to love others on His behalf.

PRAYER:

All-loving and all-knowing Lord, who are you asking me to show love to? Give me eyes that notice the isolated and the lonely, particularly in this season of sheltering in place. In your physical absence, who are you asking me to be present to in love? It is an honor for me to show love to the people you love.

Station #8- Jesus dies on the cross

Matthew 27:45-46, 50-54

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

When Jesus breathed his last, those long-dead came to life. They became firsthand witnesses to Jesus' most paradoxical teaching: Death leads to life. Can you fathom miraculously being raised back to life? How absurd would it be, though, to choose to remain entombed?

PRAYER:

Jesus, open my eyes to my own absurdities. Do I continue living entombed despite how your last breath filled my lungs? Almighty God, shake the earth again...split apart the rocks that trap and entomb me. Raise me to life, resurrecting even those areas that wreek of death.

In my newfound resurrection, empower me to walk out into the city just as those newly resurrected bodies did in Jerusalem; may my fully-aliveness be seen by many people. And may those people receive the Life found only through your death.

Amen and Amen.