

Station 1: Pilate Condemns Jesus to Die

Scripture: Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed. . . . So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." . . . and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. (Matt 27:11-14, 24, 26b)

Speaker: Jesus, I wish you would speak! I wish you would proclaim who you are. I wish you would confront the disbelief of the crowds and the arrogant cowardice of the powers that be. Surely someone will speak up for you! Where are the lepers who were healed? Where are the blind who can now see? Where are all the people who ate the bread and fish on the hillside? Where are those who followed you so easily when they thought you would become King of the Jews? Yet no one speaks. No voice in the crowd comes to your defense. You stand alone.

You stand before Pilate, the power of Rome. Weakness stands before strength. And yet, Pilate, the ruthless enforcer for the Empire is not really in control here. He cannot make you confess. He cannot quiet the crowds. For all his power, he cannot find the courage to do what is right. So he does what is safe. He yields to the crowds for the sake of order. Courage and strength do not always sit on thrones or judgment seats. Power is not always in the hands of Empires.

I have been alone. I have been falsely accused, and no one has spoken for me. I have been treated unfairly by those who could have used their power for better purposes. I can understand some of your feelings as you stand silently before Pilate and watch him proclaim his own innocence as he condemns an innocent man.

But perhaps I have treated others unfairly as well. Perhaps I have not spoken up for others when they needed a voice. There are those around me who have been treated unjustly. Have I always had the courage to come to their defense? There are those around me who feel alone and abandoned. Have I always been there for them? O Lord, forgive me for not always being who I should be.

I find it easy to condemn the moral cowardice of Pilate. Have I ever given in to pressure from others to take the easy path rather than the right path? Have I ever chosen the easy path over the right path?

Prayer: *Jesus, I see in your silence the quiet strength that reveals a peace and a resolve. O Lord, help me deal with the unfairness of life without becoming critical of others. Help me to be sensitive to the pain and feelings of others. Give me the courage to do what is right without being swayed by the demands of others.*

Station 2: Jesus Accepts His Cross

Scripture: Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. (Matthew 27:27-31)

Carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. (John 19:17)

Speaker: Jesus, I cringe at the pain of the thorns. But I am wounded far more deeply at the humiliation and degradation you suffer, that the very thing you came to offer us as a gift becomes a source of ridicule. The crowds thought of a King in terms of power. But you came to be the kind of King who shepherds his people, who takes responsibility for their well being, whose principles are faithfulness, justice, and righteousness (Isa 11:3-4). And yet, the people are not ready for that kind of King.

I would like to think that I am ready to follow you who offer a Kingdom of peace and love for one another. But am I? Am I willing to yield my ideas of what the Kingdom should look like for the role of a servant? Am I really so willing to give up my human preoccupation with power and control and accept a different kind of crown than I was expecting?

I see you accept the Cross in the midst of such mockery. You could have refused. What more could they have done to you? Yet you begin this journey knowing full well where it will lead. I hear no words of complaint, no protestations of innocence, no cursing the injustice. And yet I am so prone to complain and whine about the most trivial things. Sometimes the things I face in my life are more than trivial. Sometimes the troubles of life bear down on me. But I so easily fall into self-pity. I too often assume that I am the only one who bears a cross, or that my cross is larger and heavier than any others.

But I am not alone in that. People all around me bear far more than I must bear. You accepted your cross without self-pity. Can I follow your example?

Prayer: *O Lord, forgive me for forgetting that in my weakness I am driven to trust on you, and that in such trust my weakness becomes your strength. Forgive my attitudes of self-pity that make me more repulsive than loving. I do not ask for crosses to bear. But when they come, give me the strength to bear them as one who follows your example.*

Station 3: Simon Helps Carry the Cross

Scripture: They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. (Mark 15:21)

Speaker: Jesus, I can only imagine the awful weight of that cross you carry. It is not just the weight of beams of wood that presses down on you. It is also the weight of the burden you carry for those whom you have loved. You came to offer them life, and yet they return only death.

So I see you fall from the crushing weight of pain and grief. I don't know how many times you have fallen. But I know that your physical strength is failing. The soldiers must recognize this as well, because they force a man from the crowd to help you carry the cross the rest of the way to the place where you will be crucified. Perhaps they are afraid that you will die before you make it to the top of the hill. The man of Cyrene was just a bystander passing through on his way into town from the countryside. And yet he bears the weight of the cross to save your strength.

I would like to think that if I had been there I would have rushed from the crowd and volunteered to carry that cross for you. But would I have had the courage to face the Roman soldiers and risk being forced to join you on a cross? Would I have really been so eager to share your cross if it meant that I might have to die on one as well? Would I have been willing to risk everything to ease your suffering for a few moments by letting you know that you were not alone?

Besides, I have my own crosses already. I have as much as I can bear without taking on the added burdens of others. And what would people think of me if I were seen consorting with criminals and enemies of Rome in such a public spectacle? So instead of offering to help, I tried to become invisible in the crowd. And when the soldiers were looking around for someone to press into service, I looked away and pretended not to notice what was happening.

It is easy to pretend not to see the needs, the grief, and the suffering around me every day. It is easy to pretend not to hear the cries for help that come in many forms from those among whom I walk every day. It is easy to convince myself that I am too busy, or too tired, or have too much on my plate already to get involved in the lives of others. There are simply too many who need too much.

And yet, I remember something that you said, something about taking up my own cross and following you. You said something about becoming a servant of all, of putting myself last and others first. Is this what it means to be a servant? Jesus, are you showing me what it means to be that kind of servant. Is this man from Cyrene modeling for me the path of discipleship?

Must Jesus bear the cross alone
And all the world go free?
No, there's a cross for everyone
And there's a cross for me.

Prayer: *O Lord, forgive me for becoming so preoccupied with myself that I have become deaf and blind to the grief and suffering of those around me. Forgive me for my indifference. Constantly remind me that I cannot love you without loving others as well. Help me always remember that to be a follower of yours means that I share in the burdens of others. Lord, show me someone whose cross I may help carry.*

Station 4: Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

Scripture: When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." And that is what the soldiers did. (John 19:23-25a)

Speaker: Jesus, I want to follow you on this journey. But I cannot watch this. I must turn away as you are humiliated.

You came into this world amid celebration and anticipation. Angels sang in the heavens to celebrate your birth. As a child, Magi from the East paid homage to you as to a king. The people followed you by the thousands as you taught on the hillsides of Galilee. They wanted to make you king! Just a few days ago the crowds followed you in the streets of Jerusalem singing praises to God: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! "

Yet now, you are forced to suffer the worst of human indignity. You stand alone as the soldiers strip from you the last thing that you possess, and play games to see who will claim it.

Just yesterday, you removed your cloak and laid it aside to wash your disciples' feet. You called them to follow your example as a symbol of humility and service to others. Now you allow others to strip you of your clothes. You allow them to publicly disgrace and ridicule you. You are left with nothing, not even human decency.

Are you still trying to teach us something about what it means to serve others? Is your surrender to such degradation a model for how we are to live in the world as your followers? I don't like such an idea. I would rather walk with you into Jerusalem with the praise of the people ringing in my ears than to risk such humiliation. I *want* to follow you! But is this really what it means to be a follower, that I must lay aside everything and risk this kind of degradation? And yet, that is exactly what *you* are doing.

Prayer: *O Lord, forgive me for wanting to take the path of glory and reward. Forgive me for my selfishness that wants to serve you in easy ways and seeks the reward of others' praise. Lord, teach me the humility of spirit that replaces self-centeredness with a sacrificial spirit. Make me vulnerable so that I may follow your example. Help me see those around me who are in need. Give me the courage to lay aside the things that I use to hide from their need, and find ways to minister to others as you have shown us.*

Station 5: Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

Scripture: And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him. (Mark 15:23-32)

Speaker: Jesus, I do not want to see this. Yet I force myself to watch. I hear the sharp crack of hammer against nail and shudder. It sounds so final. Is it over? Did all those wonderful lessons you taught by the seaside mean anything? You spoke of being a light to the world, but it seems that darkness is winning.

How they mock you! You said that you could rebuild the temple in three days and I thought that anyone who can raise the dead surely could deal with broken stones. But it is not the stones in the temple that matter to you, is it? Your greater concern is how we relate to you and to one another. You so want us to know the power of living love. Is love stronger than this evil that now surrounds you?

I want to rage at the injustice of this. The cruelty of the Romans. The hypocrisy of the High Priest and religious leaders. The cowardice of the disciples. The treachery of Judas. The fickleness of the crowds. Do they not remember that you spoke of loving one another, of bearing the burdens of others, even of loving our enemies? They should know better, they should have listened and learned.

And yet, would I have done differently? Is the guilt just of those who drove the nails and the rest of us are innocent? Or is it human sin that drives the nails? *My* sin. The old American spiritual asks the question, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" I want to deny it. I want to pretend that it is someone else's guilt, someone else's sin. But I *was* there. Jesus, you are here, dying, because of *my* sin. I *was* there. It was I who drove the nails.

Prayer: *O Lord, remind me of the deathly cost of sin. Forgive me for those things I have done that are displeasing to you. Forgive me for not allowing you to deal with the darkness that I harbor in the hidden recesses of my heart. Forgive me for fooling myself into believing that I am more righteous than I am, that I am better than others, and that I have no need to repent. Forgive me for those things I should have done, but found excuses not to do. O Lord, make me better than I am, transform me into what I can be by your grace.*

Station 6: Jesus Dies on the Cross

Scripture: When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mark 15:33-39)

Speaker: It is dark in the middle of the day. It seems that the heavens and the earth are grieving, telling us that something is horribly wrong. And yet some still seem to mock. Or do they really expect some final miracle to save you?

Jesus, I hear you cry out in lament from the Psalms and know that it is the cry of human pain and desolation. Here, where too often we see you only as God, you reveal your true humanity. Most everyone has forsaken you, and in your pain the emotion escapes in a cry of abandonment. Yet, it is a prayer, a cry from human lips to a God who hears such cries.

Finally, it is over. You are dead. What have we done?

The earth shakes. The curtain in the temple is torn right down the middle. The Holy of Holies is exposed for all to see. What does it mean? Who are you? Even the Romans now think that you are the son of God. But you are dead. It's too late. What have I done?

Yet you never stopped loving me even in death. Oh, how I wish I had shown my love for you more while you were here. You died because of human sin, because of me. Yet we know that sin is never the final word. God can redeem the worst that human beings can do. But this? What can come of this? What can God do with such a final ending? We hope, and wait

Prayer: O Lord, I cannot comprehend the depth and breadth of your love. There are not enough words in all languages together to describe what your love means to me. May my love for you and my love for all your children in some way reflect your love. Let this dark night become fertile soil for growth in your love and for our growth as a community of Faith. May you use this night to teach us how to love you and to love others the way you have loved us. O Lord, we long for newness, for hope, for renewal, for life where there is now death. Out of this darkness bring to us the light of a new dawn. O Lord, have mercy on us.

Sing: Were You There When They Laid Him in the Tomb...

Speaker: We hope for the dawning of a new day. We hope for God to bring newness out of endings. But today Go home. There is nothing more to see. Jesus is dead.