

The Way of the Cross

The Book of Occasional Services explains that the Way of the Cross is an adaptation to local usage of a custom widely observed by pilgrims to Jerusalem: the offering of prayer at a series of places in that city traditionally associated with the Lord's passion and death.

The number of stations finally became fixed at fourteen. Of these, eight are based directly on events recorded in the Gospels. The remaining six are based on inferences from the Gospel or on legend. They may be omitted.

The service is appropriate for use particularly on the Fridays of Lent, but should not displace the proper liturgy of Good Friday.

These eight "stations" were written by Susanne Watson Epting, Deacon, © 2018. Permission is granted to reproduce them with attribution given to the author.

Jesus is condemned to die.

How could it have happened?

How could the One sent by God

To heal the sick.....to bind up the broken-hearted

To feed the hungry.....to love the outcast.....

How could he have been sent to death

For loving the God who gives us love....

For showing us how to

Live from the place where God lives in us?

We feel so certain we would have recognized

Who he was.....

How could he have been condemned?

Scribes....Pharisees.....hypocrites.....fools.....

And Pilate,

You coward.

We would have known better.

“Would you.....

Would you have known better?

Are there none rejected in your midst?

Jesus, is that you?

Have you none in your world

Who have loud voices?

Who demand conformity....

Unwavering conformity to a creed or a law

Or an ideal or a religion....

To an economic standard....

To maintaining life the way it is?"

Jesus, is that you?

"No.

Tell me, have you learned so much?

Can you stand now against those

Who use race and class and gender

and sexual orientation and age and disability

To condemn those who are different?

To condemn them when there is no guilt?

Do you know nothing of condemnation in your world?

Who has died today?

Do you stand against the violence of your world?

Do you teach your children courage?

And do you teach them the consequences

Of having courage?

What do you tell them you have learned

From this Jesus I condemned?"

Silence for reflection

Let us pray together.

Jesus, we are sorry. Forgive us for condemning those who are not like us. Forgive us for taking away their voices. Forgive us for not giving them voice. Deliver us. Take our hardened hearts and move us beyond thinking "us and them." Give us your courage. Let there be no other crucifixions. Help us not condemn ourselves. Show us the way. Amen.

Jesus takes up his Cross.

It was an ancient instrument of execution.

And, Jesus, following the custom of his day,

Following the procedures that had been established

for all of those executions,

Was given the crossbar to carry to Golgotha.

It is, perhaps, beyond our comprehension....

perhaps even beyond our imaginations

to know what it would be like to carry such a burden....

a burden of both persecution and of death.

Much less to understand

that Jesus carried the burden of injustice.

And that in the weight of the crossbar on his shoulders

Rests the meaning of

the mystery of suffering....

And the divine presence in the midst of

failure and brokenness and pain.

Silence for reflection

Let us pray together.

Loving Jesus, we know the weight of the difficulties in our own lives. But teach us, we pray, what we need to learn about carrying the burden with you, for others. Give us the strength to shoulder the crossbar when it is given to us, and to go forward with your courage and in your faith. Amen.

The Cross is laid on Simon of Cyrene

Simon did not ask for the crossbar.

The gospels tell us that they "compelled" him,

And one account even tells us that

they "seized" Simon.

He had just come in from the country

A stranger to those in Jerusalem.

Why Simon? And why was the crossbar given to him?

Jesus was a carpenter.

Surely he had developed strength over the years

in his hands and his arms....

And he had walked with his disciples many miles.

Perhaps it was because he had been beaten....

Yes, he had been flogged before he was given over to be crucified.

Usually that happened when the prisoner

reached the place of execution.

But they had beaten Jesus first.

And then they pressed Simon into service.

Perhaps it was because at that point in the journey
there were no friends to help.

But from the heart of Jerusalem
to the Place of the Skull,

Simon carried the outward sign of the burden of persecution that
Jesus accepted.

Did they speak?

Did they look at one another?

Might they both have shared the terror of this wooden crossbar?

It was perhaps a quiet terror

Jesus leading the way.....persecuted for living God's vision

Simon following just behind

Shouldering the weight of the tree....

Bound by the instrument of execution.

Silence for reflection

Let us pray together.

Jesus we know that we share in your death and resurrection. But
we forget the journey to Golgotha. We cannot fathom walking
toward an execution. Is that why we stumble in knowing what to

do when others are persecuted....in countries filled with refugees....in places of political tyranny ...and even in your own Jerusalem? Who will press us into service? Jesus, show us the way. Amen.

Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem.

Tears of fright? Tears of grief? Tears of the crowd's hysteria?

Jesus heard them crying.

And stopping the slow and steady march to Golgotha,

He looked at them from the road to death and said,

"Do not weep for me."

"Do not weep for me."

What could he have meant?

And how puzzled they must have been.

"Weep for yourselves and for your children...."

Weep for the evil of the world....

And weep that your children bear the consequences of this sin...."

What was it? Were their tears not authentic?

Were they tears of women trained to wail at death and drama?

Or were they simply tears that could not understand

The depth and consequences of humanity's broken ways?

It is not easy to understand....even now.

Perhaps our tears would not be so different.

No, it is not easy to take this in....

Do we hide from it? Do we not recognize it?

Jesus, how would you have us weep?

Perhaps there are such Fridays even now.

Perhaps you still look at us in our weeping

As we struggle through these troubled times,

As we weep for all who live in cages,

As we wrestle with those who seek profit over compassion....

Jesus, was that you looking out from the temporary morgue for those who have died from the Corona virus?

"Do not weep for me."

Jesus of the Cross, give our tears meaning.

Silence for reflection

Let us pray together.

Jesus of the darkest Friday, help us understand. In a world of privilege and comfort, help us understand that we cannot hide from our brokenness. And then, dear Jesus of the Cross, help us remember, and bless us in our weeping. Amen.

Jesus is stripped of his garments.

They had already spit in his face.

They had struck his head.

They had pressed the crown of thorns
into his flesh.

Perhaps then, it was the last thing
they could think of

To discredit him.....to shame him...

To take away his dignity.

They stripped him of his garments

Seeking to expose him.

And what was it they exposed?

Sweat

Bruises

Dirt

It is an odd thing....this stripping off

And putting on.

Indeed there is a time to every purpose under heaven.

A time to be stripped

And a time to be clothed.

We seem to have such a hard time discerning
the times and the purposes.

For our finery,

The clothes we wear,

The purpose of which is so often more

Than to protect us from the elements,

And while we are shopping

For what flatters....for what fits

For what label.....

Jesus is stripped.

And they cast lots for his one seamless tunic.

Silence for reflection

Let us pray together.

Naked Jesus, in seeking to expose you, they exposed themselves.
Show us when we fail. Show us the times when we, too, seek to

strip others of their pride. Show us when we seek to cover ours, when we cover our pride, and our insecurity, and our fear of being vulnerable. Clothe us, blessed Jesus, with one seamless tunic, woven in you. Amen.

Jesus is nailed to the Cross.

The accounts in the gospels
tell us only that he was crucified.
They do not tell of the nailing.
They do not tell of his tears
or of his muffled cries,
Or any of the other details.
Perhaps the horror of such a death
Made it sufficient to say simply
That he was crucified.
But He was nailed to the Cross
And then this Jesus
Was lifted high...nailed and lifted.
Behold the Son of God.....
Hanging there and looking down.
Jesus, what did you see?
They were all helpless, weren't they?

Those who crucified you in the name of God...

Those who crucified you in the name of Caesar...

Those who watched your crucifixion...

Were they close enough to see your eyes?

Were they close enough to see

reflected in your eyes

The pain of the world....

Pain bearer.

Behold the Son of God.....

Hanging there and looking down.

Could they see in your face

The faces of all who suffer and bleed and die?

Were they close enough to see your eyes?

And what did you see?

Did your eyes of love and wounds,

Your dark and penetrating eyes

Did they finally become cloudy...

As death began its clutching

What did you see?

Jesus, who could hold your gaze?

Silence for reflection

Let us pray together.

Jesus of the Cross, gaze on us. And in our looking back, help us see the body broken, the blood poured out. Help us see the gaze of all who suffer. Help us count the cost. Give us the courage, if only for a little while, to hold your gaze and to share your pain. Jesus of the Cross, take us in. Amen.

Jesus dies on the Cross.

Of ancient crucifixions

they tell us sometimes it took days

before death overcame its victim.

Jesus, your dying did not take so long.

Is it for the sake of story?

Is it that you did not resist death?

Is it that you were prepared?

Or is it, perhaps, that you had been dying all along?

Time and time again you told the disciples

that you would die.

They never understood.

But each time you confronted the powers

you knew they were plotting,

you knew they would kill you,

and even though that did not stop you

surely it took its toll.

Each time you offered glory
through a healing or a miracle
to the One who sent you,
You knew the risk.
In your divinity you carried on.
In your humanity, dear Jesus,
Did it not take life from you?
Having loved your own who were in the world
You loved them to the end.
And the night you were handed over
You washed the feet of your betrayer.
Could you have been dying even then?
Perhaps in the end, it does not matter.
But, dear Jesus, it was a long walk to Golgotha,
A long ways to come to show us the way.
And now, for the last time, your eyes are closed..
It is finished.

Silence for reflection

Let us pray together.

Jesus you were willing to bear the torture of the Cross. As we gaze in our hearts at your lifeless body, we know your presence. Teach us. Let your holy passion, your agony, your dying, fill the depth of our need. Take what we bring to the foot of your cross and transform it. Take it into your dying. Amen.

Jesus is laid in the tomb.

He was Joseph of Arimathea.

He was a rich man willing to take a risk.

It was dangerous, after all, to be a friend of Jesus.

Perhaps his wealth and status made the difference.

It was still a risk.

He must have loved Jesus very much.

And so they took his body down.

There wasn't much time before the Sabbath began.

But as quickly as they could, Joseph and the women

tenderly wrapped his body in a shroud,

And with their tears they consecrated his passing.

Gently they placed him in the tomb.

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life
for one's friends."

And so they laid him to rest,

Rabbi, teacher, friend, servant

the beloved of God, despised by the world.

They rolled a great stone to close the tomb.

It is finished.

Amen.

Silence for reflection

Let us pray together.

Jesus of the tomb, we too long to be your friends as you rest in death. Take our love. Jesus of the star, Jesus of the desert, Jesus of wonders and signs, healing and miracles, Jesus of the Cross and Grave, take our love and our sorrow. Give us the courage to be with the silence of your Grave as you prepare us for your rising. Amen.

