

The Stations of the Cross

VIA CRUCIS

**A Meditation
on the
Way of the Cross
in a set of fourteen stations
by Thomas Hardin
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Dedicated
**to the worship and music ministries of
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**Devotional Text
Written and Compiled
by
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The *Stations of the Cross* generally refers to a devotion that originated in the 4th century when pilgrims flocked to the Holy Land from all parts of the world to visit the land of Jesus. When they got there, the most popular place visited was the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which had been built by the Emperor Constantine in 335 A.D. over what was believed to be the tomb of Jesus. Over the years, the route of pilgrim processions—beginning at the ruins of the Fortress Antonia and ending at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (the tomb)—was accepted as the way that Jesus had walked to his death. It became known as the "Via Dolorosa", the "Sorrowful Way", or "Way of the Cross".

The Via Dolorosa marks the path Jesus traveled as he carried the cross from the place he was sentenced to the place of his resurrection. Through the years, "stations" developed as early pilgrims honored places where events were likely to have taken place. Many of these stations are only a guess since the Jerusalem of Jesus' day was almost completely destroyed by the Roman armies in 70 AD. But since the majority of Christians throughout the world could not journey to Jerusalem to walk the Via Dolorosa, the Stations became a spiritual tool that would give them an opportunity for a "mini-pilgrimage". It became a way for every Christian to enter that Holy Walk, the "Way of the Cross", the way that takes us through the sorrows and despair of Holy Week that we, too, might emerge victorious in the glory of the Resurrection.

So, walk this way. It may not be easy or pleasant or calming to the soul. But by walking the Way of Sorrows, by entering the walk that Christ walked, one will truly encounter the incredible Feast of Joy. Begin your walk with the prayer below and then, as you walk, stop and gaze upon each station. Say the prayer of contemplation. And look.. Think about what it means. Place yourself in its center. And when you are ready, move on... The Path is yours to walk.

We will glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.
In Whom is our Salvation, our Life, and Resurrection.

I. *Jesus is condemned*

Before the station, pray: *I adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read Luke 23: 1-24

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and he said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. " ... "Crucify, crucify him!" ...So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted.

Jesus is the victim of the consummate power struggle, conflicting purposes that are exacerbated by the personalities and fears of those involved. The person whose life is at stake seems to be ignored. And justice fails. The truth is, Jesus stands for all those things that are different from what we know. Jesus says those things that the world does not want to hear. He speaks against the status quo. He speaks for those rejected and cast aside by acceptable society. Jesus creates chaos in the midst of our orderly lives. He must be silenced.

Oh, we stand in awe of these convictions. We are amazed that someone has the courage to look into the face of death and, without fear, say nothing. And yet many of us are silenced by our fears and our anxieties and our attempts to maintain our carefully preserved lives.

And now he stands. . .in silence. "And darkness covered the face of the deep." (Gen. 1:2a). Father, forgive.

Jesus, true and silent victim, let the power of your life, the beauty of your silence, be my courage. In the name of the One who redeems me. Amen.

II. *Jesus takes up his cross*

Before the station, pray: *I adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read John 19: 16-17

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.

And Jesus, carrying his own cross, starts his "Way of the Cross". Weak and alone, but with great dignity, Jesus emerges from the fortress. And yet...there was so much that he still had to accomplish. It was almost too great to bear.

This wooden cross was a tree—a tree that God created, that God nurtured, that God showered with the joy of life—a tree that would become the instrument of Christ's death. We are asked, then, to bear the cross, to bear the instrument of death. We are asked to bear life.

Sadhu Sundar Singh says that *"if we do not bear the cross of the Master, we will have to bear the cross of the world, with all of its earthly goods."* Which cross is yours to bear? Father, forgive.

Jesus, may your willingness to carry your cross be my strength in losing my life that I may find it. In the name of the One who bears all things. Amen.

III. Jesus falls the first time

Before the station, pray: *We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read Matthew 27: 27-31

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.

Jesus was exhausted and trembling under the weight of the cross-beam. He could not take it any longer and fell to the ground, face down in the dust and dirt of the well-traveled path. Someone jerked him up from his moment's rest and prodded him on. And the world stands and watches, seemingly unmoved by the visceral treatment of one who was once so renowned. "Hail, King of the Jews", now fallen, now face down in the dust and dirt of the well-traveled path.

Where are we? Do we lay there in the pathway of forgotten footprints? Do we stand by the sidelines too afraid to move? We must get up and get going. It is time to follow. Father, forgive.

Jesus, may your courage be my stamina for getting up again and again, realizing that only the weak fall once. In the name of the One who raises me up on eagle's wings. Amen.

IV. Jesus meets his mother

Before the station, pray: / *adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read Luke 1:35-55

The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. "...Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

She loved her son.. .loved him with the deepest love that any mother would. After all, this was the child that she carried in her womb, birthed into the world in the rough hues of that cold desert night shielded only by a stable, or a cave, or a grotto, or something of the like. This was the child that she nurtured and saw grow into a successful young man. And now here he is.. .carrying the cross like a common criminal.. .bleeding and exhausted.. .but she is held back from approaching him. What she is called to do is atrocious. She must give him up.

But what about God? This is God's child—one that God created and loved and with perfect love gave him to the world as a part of Godself. And this perfect love, this part of God, is being rejected by those to whom he was given.

But even in this we are called to forgiveness, the forgiveness that God showed us through the deepest love of a mother's heart.
Father, forgive.

Jesus, may your love, and that of your mother, be the spark of my zeal in the cause of spreading justice and peace throughout the human family. In the name of the One who brings all unity. Amen.

V. Jesus is helped by Simon the Cyrene to carry his cross

Before the station, pray: *I adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read Mark 16: 15-22

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor 's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort... Then they led him out to crucify him. They compelled a passerby, who was coming in from the country, to carry the cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull).

We really know very little about Simon — is he black, brown, white, olive-skinned? Does it matter? He was from Libya — a foreigner to the city of Jerusalem. Anonymously plucked out of the crowd to help a bleeding dying man, he stooped and hoisted the cross that Jesus was carrying to his own shoulder. Even at this late hour, God has orchestrated a Divine reversal in what the world expected.

We are asked to contemplate how we are being asked to help Jesus carry the cross. This means letting go of all of our fears, our prejudices, and justifications that hold us back from connecting with others, from completing the circle of God's creation that is love. Father, forgive.

Jesus, may I be the one that carries your cross, that steps forward into the difficult venues of your love. In the name of the One who shows me what it means to be your Disciple. Amen.

VI. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Before the station, pray: *I adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read John 13: 3- 17

Jesus... got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him . . . Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.

Tradition identifies Veronica as the woman who Jesus had healed of a blood disorder (Luke 8: 43-48) who comes to be with him on the day of his crucifixion. This was a woman so moved by the compassion that she had been shown that she knows no other way to respond except with that same compassion. As she steps toward Jesus, she wipes the sweat from his face and the imprint, the image of Jesus, is left on the cloth. In her compassion, Veronica was able to look through death and despair to the real image of Christ and, in doing so, found it in herself.

The derivation of her name is from the words *Vera* (Latin, "true") and *Icon* (Greek, "image"). Being human, being made in the true image of God, means that we are called to show compassion to others, who are also the "image of God". We can no longer dismiss our shortcomings as "merely human". Being human means being made in the image of God. Being human is what we are called to be. Father, forgive.

Jesus, remind me again and again what it means to be human, what it means to be made in your image, that my life might be an imprint of your image for the world to see. Amen.

VII. Jesus falls the second time

Before the station, pray: / *adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read Matthew 27: 27-31

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.

Here, the procession arrives at the Gate of Judgment, the place where the authorities would pronounce the final judgment on those convicted of crimes. This was the last point of hope. This was the place where many sentences were converted or lessened. Jesus knew that this would not be the case for him. Barrabbas has already been pardoned. There was no hope.

This time Jesus does not fall under the weight of his cross but, rather, the weight of the world. It is just too much to bear. And he falls. He falls at the gate. There is no going back. There is only going forward. The only thing left for the world is hope. Father, forgive.

Jesus, when all hope is lost, remind me to look to you, the hope for all things yet to be. Amen.

VIII. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

Before the station, pray: *I adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the -world.*

Read Luke 23: 27-31

A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed. Then they will begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us ', and to the hills, 'Cover us. ' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? "

The women were convinced of Christ's holiness. And this holy man was bleeding, covered in sweat and dirt, and near death. But he was still holy. Christ tells them not to weep for him, but for themselves, for their children, and for the world. If we weep, we weep for the world. Weeping, is itself a form of prayer for the world around us.

Just outside the gates of the city, Jesus opens himself to the world. He knows that the world will hurt; he knows that the world will suffer; he knows that the world pits brother against brother and poverty against greed. He knows that the world will weep. In our humanity, we weep, and in our tears, we drown, and in our work and in our life and in our faith, we find the hope for a world yet to be. Father, forgive.

Jesus, I weep—for my own self, for my church, for the world. May my tears become drops of nourishment and waters of life as I claim our part in bringing Creation into full being in your name. Amen.

IX. Jesus falls the third time

Before the station, pray: *I adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read Matthew 27: 27-31

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters... 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!"... Then they led him away to crucify him.

For us, we sense that this is a grand procession, but in all truth, this was a common occurrence in that time: the poor criminal, already rejected by society, being dragged to a death that he or she must deserve. And this was the eve of Passover—a busy time to say the least. After all, there were errands to be done and food to be prepared and houses to clean. So think of all the passersby, scurrying through their lives, many complaining about the clogged roads because of the procession. Many would have just passed by on the other side of the road, not wanting to touch or be touched by hopelessness and despair and even death.

We, too, fall whenever we pass by on the other side. We miss the grace that God offers in the touch of the unexpected. We miss the opportunity to be who God calls us to be. Father, forgive.

Jesus, I often pass by on the other side of your grace. I often close my life to the opportunities that you reveal. May my life become one of compassion for others in your Name. Amen.

X. Jesus is stripped of his garments

Before the station, pray: *I adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read John 19: 23-25

...They took his clothes and divided them into four parts... 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.

As a Jew, Jesus has been taught never to be seen naked. In those terms, this would be the ultimate disgrace. But Jesus' disgrace is ours. His nakedness is ours. Stripped of his clothes and his dignity, Jesus remains unashamed. We can only ask God's forgiveness for those times that we striped others of their dignity and we realize that as the accoutrements of this life are stripped away, we have nowhere to turn but to God.

The other part of this is that Jesus was stripped of his garments, of everything that he knew. He was humiliated but he was also humbled. We, too, are called to humble ourselves before God, to, in essence, strip everything away so that God can make us new.

It is late morning on that day. Jesus has been stripped of all human dignity. And the cross is being prepared. This is the final hour. Father, forgive.

Jesus, Strip me now of all those things that get in the way of my being one with you. May my life become purely what you would have me be. Amen.

XI. *Jesus is nailed to the cross*

Before the station, pray: *I adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world*

Read Mark 15: 22-33

Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him...

It is here that our regrets sink in. It is here that we want to go back. We would do it differently next time. We would not ask so many questions as to why he was doing what he was doing and to whom. We would just watch and listen and learn from him how to love. We would not fight and grapple with each other over who was in charge, over who was the most important, over who was his favorite. Instead, we would bask in his spirit and his radiance and his love of equality for all. And when asked if we knew who he was, we would not betray him. Rather, we would step forward no matter the cost. But we cannot go back.

The sounds are deafening. The clanging rings out over the land and settles into our hearts. A nail of greed. A nail of selfishness. Nails of betrayal and hatred and war. Nails of hunger and poverty. Nails of not accepting and loving each other. Nails of being so sure of one's beliefs, so sure of one's understanding of who God is and who God wants us to be, that we miss what God is trying to show us. It is finished. In the Name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Father, forgive.

Jesus, I have many regrets in my life, even though I know that you offer forgiveness for all. Open that path of forgiveness that I may forgive myself and accept what you offer. Amen.

XII. Jesus dies on the cross

Before the station, pray: *I adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read Mark 15: 37-39

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!"

"It is finished." As Jesus breathed his last, the temple curtain tore in two, revealing a new world in which holiness was no longer separate and hidden from view. Trembling and shaking in the darkness, the earth opened to reveal a glimpse of a future yet to be. And through our grief and tears, God entered the heartbreak and brokenness of the world and began recreating it. In this moment, God's future enters our present. And in the most unfathomable act of love, the cross becomes God's highest act of Creation. Because with it, we and all of Creation are made new. That which is finished is the beginning of life. In this moment, our own eternity is conceived.

Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were an offering far too small: Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. (Isaac Watts, UMH # 298)

Father, forgive.

Jesus, Through my tears and my grief, I see your love flowing into the world. Enable me to be an instrument of that love that all may know the amazing love that I feel. Amen.

XIII. Jesus is taken down from the cross

Before the station, pray: *I adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read Luke 23: 52-53

This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid.

It is indeed over. There is a sickening finality to it all. Why did it have to end like this? Why did it have to end at all? We were just beginning to understand. We were just beginning to get what we were supposed to be doing. And now it is over. And then there's this darkness. It's never been this dark at this time of day. It adds to the pall of our souls. We have to go back now. But to what? After all, deep down we know that he changed us. How can we live now in the world? How can we go back? And yet, in this moment of our deepest despair, we remember that we have found love. Life will be different because we have found love.

Father, forgive.

Jesus, I do not like endings. I was just getting comfortable. I want to go back—to manglers, and stars, and picnics on the hillside. Your love, though, tells me to go on. Give me strength to walk in that love even in the midst of grief, to walk in the light even in the shadows. Amen.

XIII. Jesus is laid in the tomb

Before the station, pray: *I adore you, O Christ, and I bless you, because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.*

Read John 19: 3 8-42

... They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths...Now there was a garden in the place where there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

We have walked away from graves before and left the remains of a life behind us. But this... this is different. And so we strip our altars and we strip our lives and we try to make room for you. And then we wait. We wait for you to come. We wait for you to rise. We keep vigil and we enter into deep prayer, knowing the day will come. And we wait. We wait for our eternity to be born. We waited for your coming once before, for your birth. But this is different. Now we wait for our own. And you...you are even now busy descending into hell, gathering up all that ever was so that it will forever be. And so we wait for the Easter dawn. Father, forgive.

Jesus. In the darkness, we wait for your light. Give us patience and strength. But more than that, give us the vision that you see for the dawn. Empower us to be your Easter people. In the Name of our Redeemer, the One who give us life. Amen.

I am the resurrection, and the
life: he that believeth in me,
though he were dead, yet shall
he live: And whosoever liveth
and believeth in me shall never
die. *John 11:25-26*