
Praying the Stations of the Cross

by Ruth Haley Barton

Opening Meditation

A custom of our Christian tradition is to keep vigil with Christ at different times and in different ways during Holy Week. One of the places from which we draw this custom is Jesus' request to his disciples to keep watch while he prayed and agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane. We also know that there were those few—including Mary Magdalene, Jesus' mother Mary, and the apostle John—who stayed near the cross and kept watch as Jesus suffered and died. Despite the horror of what was taking place, those most intimate with Jesus stayed with him to the end.

*Walking and praying through stations of the cross is one way we can keep vigil with Christ during these holy days. Traditionally, there are fourteen Stations of the Cross—most of them taken directly from Scripture, along with a few that have been passed down in Christian tradition. In this worship service, all fourteen stations are included so that, as much as possible, we can experience Christ's road to the cross as the long and arduous journey that it was. At each station there is a scripture reading and prayer of response followed by several moments of silence so that you can listen to what Christ might have to say to you at that station. After the leader says, "Lord, in your mercy", the group will read the (bolded) response together: **Hear our prayer.** Whatever is **bolded** in the service, the group will read together.*

Let us walk prayerfully into these moments of meditation, watching and waiting with Christ through the darkness of his death and burial so that together we can share in the joy of his resurrection.

Silence/Personal Reflection

A period of silence, supported by quiet music, provides space for you to prepare for walking the way of the cross with Christ.

Prayer

Let us pray together. Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified:

All: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer

Hymn

Lead Me to Calvary

King of my life I crown Thee now,
Thine shall the glory be;
Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow,
Lead me to Calvary.

Refrain:

Lest I forget Gethsemane;
Lest I forget Thine agony,
Lest I forget Thy love for me,
Lead me to Calvary.

Show me the tomb where Thou wast laid,
Tenderly mourned and wept;
Angels in robes of light arrayed
Guarded Thee while Thou slept.
(Refrain)

Let me, like Mary, through the gloom,
Come with a gift to Thee;
Show to me now the empty tomb,
Lead me to Calvary.
(Refrain)

May I be willing, Lord, to bear
Daily my cross for Thee;
Even Thy cup of grief to share,
Thou hast borne all for me.
(Refrain)

The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

(Matthew 27:15-24)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, we are all condemned to death. Sometimes we bring death on ourselves; sometimes it is at the hands of others. Always, death is an inevitability of the human situation. Even though we try to avoid it, the Paschal rhythm of death, burial, and resurrection teaches us that the only path to new life leads through the dark and narrow passageway of death.

Lord Jesus Christ, friend and brother, you faced your accusers with quiet dignity. You walked into your death with honesty and grace. Show me those places in my own life where I must die to self in order to be born to new life.

As we walk this way together, teach me how to meet my own deaths—large and small—with courage and grace.

SILENCE

*Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

The Second Station: Jesus Takes Up His Cross

(John 19:17)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, sometimes your call upon our lives seems like more than we can bear. We are tempted to shrink from the challenges and hardships of our path. We wonder if we can make it all the way up the hill. Lord Jesus Christ, you carried your own cross with strength and perseverance and were undeterred by those who demeaned you along the way.

As we walk this way together, show me what is my cross to carry, my burden to bear, and teach me how to shoulder it well. Today is the day for me to learn more of what it means to take up my cross and follow you.

SILENCE

*Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

The Third Station: Jesus Falls for the First Time

(Traditional)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, we are afraid of falling. Afraid of failing. Afraid of not being seen as strong and able to manage everything that has been given to us to do. Somehow the expectations have gotten so high that there is no place for weakness, for vulnerability, for needing help. We try to pretend that we can live far beyond human limitations and we ruin ourselves in the process. Lord Jesus Christ, our friend and brother, on the day you accomplished God's greatest purpose for your life, you fell. You, the Creator of the Universe, the Word that spoke all things into being and holds them all together, stumbled under the weight of a man-made cross.

As we walk this way together, teach me how to let myself be human. When I fall, help me not to be paralyzed with shame or waste energy with excuses; rather help me to get up and keep walking the path that is marked out for me.

SILENCE

*Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

(John 19:26, 27)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, your life on this earth was shaped by a mother who was utterly given over to the will of God in her life. Her prayer, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word," reverberates throughout history as a picture of what it means to be totally given over to the will of God. I wonder what it was like to look into her eyes that day and see the pain that such willingness brought upon her. Who could have imagined that it would all end so horribly? Was there any regret in her eyes?

Lord Jesus Christ, our brother and our friend, your mother's life teaches us that sometimes we must let go of that which we have birthed. We must allow it to be taken from us in order for it to be returned to us again. Sometimes it seems like this is the deepest pain of all.

As we walk this way together, teach me how to bear this pain when it is time.

SILENCE

*Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

The Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry His Cross

(Luke 23:26)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, sometimes we need help. We need companions on the way to help us shoulder our burdens when they get too heavy. And yet, we are embarrassed to ask for help or unable to receive it when it is given. As we walk this path together, forgive me for my proud self-sufficiencies and for all the ways in which they wall me off from you and from others. Save me from the exhaustion that sets in when I am unable to receive the help I need.

As we walk this way together, help me learn to recognize the help you send and to humbly receive it when it is given.

SILENCE

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

The Sixth Station: A Woman Wipes the Face of Jesus

(Traditional)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, it is one thing to receive help because someone is pressed into duty; it is quite another to experience compassion freely given. I am taken with this woman whose compassion moved her to do the one small thing she could do for you. She could not save you from what was before you, but she could be kind to you along the way. She saw the blood and sweat pouring down your face and so she did something so simple. So needed. So true. She wiped your face. Would I have had the courage to step out of my safe place in the crowd and expose myself to danger in order to help a stranger? Would I have been able to calm my beating heart and queasy stomach long enough to reach out or would I have been paralyzed by fear? If I had been the one exhausted and bloodied on the road, would I have had the humility to receive the ministry of a stranger?

As we walk this path together, help me to see the one small thing I can do for you and help me to do it before the moment passes.

SILENCE

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time

(Traditional)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, I hate these falling stations. They embarrass me. It is hard for me to admit when and where I have fallen. I want so much to nuance it. Make it look like something it is not. Blame it on someone else. But as I watch you fall, weakened from the beatings, the loss of blood, the lack of food and water, the betrayals of your friends, I see that there is something in you that is still strong: your commitment to God, your sense of yourself, your commitment to complete the journey that is yours to make. In you I see that there is no shame in falling because that is the way the learning comes. In you I see that falling is not the same thing as being a failure.

As we walk this path together, teach me how to get up again with dignity and continue in your way.

SILENCE

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

The Eighth Station: Jesus Speaks to the Women of Jerusalem

(Luke 23:27-31)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, teach us how to grieve. We do not know how to grieve and what to grieve for. Like the women of Jerusalem, our grieving is full of melodrama and it usually misses the point. True grief, the kind that comes from seeing and grasping our true situation, is so deep it can hardly be spoken. It can only be endured. Lord Jesus Christ, our brother and our friend, our journey with you must be one of true sorrow and true conversion.

As we walk this path together, lead me beyond the melodrama of public weeping and wailing into the godly grief that leads to true repentance. Let me know the comfort promised to those who truly mourn.

SILENCE

*Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time

(Traditional)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, I am frustrated with the falling. I keep hoping that last time will be the last time, but it is not. I keep wishing that at some point on the journey I could be certain that we can transcend our own human frailty, never to fall again. Perhaps I am finally getting it: falling and getting up again is and always will be a part of the journey until we are finally home. Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for not giving in to despair when the road got so hard. Thank you for getting up again each and every time you fell.

As we walk this path together, grant me the perseverance and the humility to continue falling and rising until I am safely home.

SILENCE

*Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

The Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

(Matthew 27:31)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, this station is hard for me. Even now, I want to find some way to avert my eyes... pretend it didn't really happen... convince myself they did not strip you completely, that they left you with some shred of dignity. But somehow, I don't think they did. This business of being stripped of one's dignity is more than I can bear. As we walk this path together, I become aware of how much I protect myself to maintain my own dignity. I become aware of how I strip others of their dignity.

As we walk this path together, help me to look at you and see that even though they could strip you of your clothing, they could not strip you of your true identity. Help me to root my identity more completely in you so I know that ultimately I have nothing to lose.

SILENCE

*Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

The Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

(Matthew 27:33-37)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, the time has come. The moment to which your whole life has been leading. I look at you and see that you are not afraid. You are resolute and committed and I am in awe of what I see. Is there any word that could come from my mouth, any sentence that could capture what is happening now? You die for me, you give your all for my sins, you become the Man of Sorrows so that I can have joy.

As we walk this path together, I learn that sometimes there are no words...

Song

Behold the Lamb of God

Behold the Lamb of God battered and bruised,
Impaled upon a cross, beaten and abused.
Behold the Lamb of God writhing in pain;
He took upon Himself all my guilt, all my shame.
Behold the Lamb of God, the Blessed Lamb of God;
All glory to the Lamb that was slain for my sin.

SILENCE

*Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.***

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies Upon the Cross

(Luke 23:44-49)

Lord Jesus Christ, our Teacher on the Way, how did you know when it was time to let go? How did you know when you had suffered enough and could finally and completely commend your spirit into God's hand? I confess that I don't always know when to let go. I cling and grasp for every last straw. I do not lay my life down willingly and so it has to be wrenched from me and that always hurts more. As we walk this path together, teach me how to let go when it is time. Teach me to relinquish that very last breath of a thing I think is mine to claim in this life, so I can live in total abandonment to you. But even in this, help me not force what I cannot be or jump ahead of where I really am.

As we walk this path together, show me how to do what I do not yet know how to do.

Hymn

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!

SILENCE

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

The Thirteenth Station: Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross

(Luke 23:50-55)

We watch in silence as Jesus' body is taken down from the cross, wrapped in a linen cloth and prepared for burial. We allow ourselves to feel the depth of Christ's love for us and the depth of our loss. We bow or kneel in response to this sacred moment.

SILENCE

Leader: Lord, have mercy.

The Fourteenth Station: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

(Matthew 27:57-61)

We follow those who carry Jesus' body to the tomb and wait in silence as Jesus' body is laid there and the tomb is sealed.

Hymn

Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord ?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord ?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they crucified my Lord ?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree ?
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree ?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they nailed him to the tree ?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb ?
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb ?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble
Were you there when they laid him in the tomb ?

SILENCE

As we are ready, depart in silence, prepared
to watch and wait with Christ until Resurrection Sunday.

Praying the Stations of the Cross

AN INVITATION TO WALK WITH CHRIST

Hymn & Song Sources

Were You There

Traditional spiritual. Public Domain.

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

Isaac Watts. Public Domain.

Lead Me to Calvary

Text: Jennie Evelyn Hussey

Music: William J. Kirkpatrick

Public Domain

Behold the Lamb of God

Words and music by Rory Noland

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For information
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