

The Journey of The Cross



A Good Friday Reflection

Welcome

Welcome to this service of meditation at the cross. During this service there will be Bible readings and other reflections read aloud. We will use six candles and a cross to reflect during our time together.

You may wish to pause the video and gather a simple cross and six candles or tea lights yourself if you have them in the house.

We begin in silence during which you might wish to ask God to meet with you here over this time.

Collect

Almighty Father, look with mercy on this your family for which our Lord Jesus Christ was content to be betrayed and given up into the hands of sinners and to suffer death upon the cross; who is alive and glorified with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Psalm 118:19-29

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD.

This is the LORD's gate; the righteous shall enter through it.

I will give thanks because you have answered me. You have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This has come from the LORD.

It is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day on which the Lord has acted.

Let us shout with joy and rejoice in it.

Please, save us, O LORD! Please!

O LORD, please bring success!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

We bless you from the house of the LORD.

The LORD is God

He has given us light. With cords bind the festival sacrifice to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you.

You are my God, I will extol you.

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good.

For his steadfast love endures forever.

Prayer

O Lord, we are gathered together here this day as your people, as those who have been called out of darkness into

your marvelous light. We are here only because you have loved us and been faithful across the generations that we might be your people. And yet we quickly confess that we are not worthy of that love.

As we contemplate the Cross and what it means, we are filled with joy and wonder at the sacrifice that Jesus has made to show us light in the darkness and offer us life in the midst of death. We confess that we have nothing to offer in return for that sacrifice, nothing that will match such love. We know that only love can respond to such a gift. Yet we know that we are not always loving or lovable. But you remain steadfastly faithful to us. You love us even when we are not lovable, and remain steadfast in your grace that calls us to follow the example of Jesus who is the Christ.

We are committed to that journey, to be followers of the One who has given so much that we might be sons and daughters of God. But sometimes the journey that we take in following Jesus who is the Christ is not all light and joy. Sometimes the Way is rough and dimly lit. Sometimes the darkness of life threatens to engulf the light. And so we cry out to you, O Lord. Forgive us for our sometimes faltering steps.

Show us more clearly the Way. Shine anew the light of your presence into our lives so strongly that a new love for You will be kindled. Light within us a love beyond emotion and sentimentality, a love that is willing to lay aside all privilege and self-centeredness. Grow within us a love that is willing to surrender all our fears and uncertainties to you, that desires nothing more than to love God with all our being and to love those around us with the same faithfulness with which you love us.

Now, as we begin this journey of the Cross, we open our hearts and minds to you. We lay aside for these moments the trivialities of our life and bring ourselves into your presence. Speak to us what we need to hear. And help us to hear, not just the words that are spoken, but your Word spoken afresh in our hearts.

Speak, for your servants are listening.

Let us begin our journey.

Station 1 - Pilate condemns Jesus to die

Matthew 27:11-14, 24, 26b

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!'

...But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

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?

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.

O Lord, hear our prayers.

Silence

There is a short time of silent prayer and meditation.

Following this time a candle is extinguished.

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 round 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 spat 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.

John 19:17

Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

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?

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.

O Lord, be merciful to us.

Silence

There is a short time of silent prayer and meditation.

Following this time a candle is extinguished.

Station 3 - Simon helps carry the Cross

Mark 15:21

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.

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.

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.

O Lord, hear our prayers.

Silence

There is a short time of silent prayer and meditation.

Following this time a candle is extinguished.

Station 4 - Jesus is stripped of His garments

John 19:23-25a

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.

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 publically 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.

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.

O Lord, hear our prayers.

Silence

There is a short time of silent prayer and meditation.

Following this time a candle is extinguished.

Station 5 - Jesus is nailed to the Cross

Mark 15:23-32

Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the jews.

They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!' In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.' Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

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.

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.

O Lord, forgive us for those things we have done and those things we have left undone. In your grace, be merciful to us.

Silence

There is a short time of silent prayer and meditation.

Following this time a candle is extinguished.

Station 6 - Jesus dies on the Cross

Mark 15:33-39

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' (which means 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?').

When some of those standing near heard this, they said, 'Listen, he's calling Elijah.'

Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 'Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down,' he said.

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'

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

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.

O Lord, hear our prayers. We hope in you and trust in your mercy.

Silence

A black drape is placed over the cross.

There is a short time of silent prayer and meditation.

Following this time a candle is extinguished.

Conclusion

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.