



THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

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: 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 your Son our Lord. Amen.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen**

This year, our Good Friday pilgrimage is guided by the writings of Katie Sherrod from her book, *Women of the Passion, A Journey to the Cross*. Our path includes three opening meditations and then a shorter reflection at each of the traditional 14 stations.

The reflections are stories of women who witnessed the Passion of Jesus Christ, as well as the several women whose lives were touched by Jesus as he went through the countryside healing, affirming, raising up, and receiving insight and challenge from women who shaped his ministry and his expression of the divine love which he brought to all situations. Some of these women would have been among the women that Scripture tells us provided for Jesus and the disciples “out of their means”. They would have been the among the women who stood off at a distance and kept vigil at the Crucifixion.

Now, their stories are told. You are invited to engage in the Good Friday worship video so that you may hear these sacred stories read aloud as all scripture should be. Let us pray into and through the stories, so we may find a new way to be touched by the healing love and grace of Jesus.

Faithfully,
Mother Barbara

Meditation 1. Jesus is Anointed.

Meditation 2. Jesus is Denied by Peter

Meditation 3. The Dream of Pilate’s Wife

I
JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH



Women are bound in blood with Christ.
**Jesus bleeds on the cross,
blood is the cup of the New Covenant.**

Several of us gather at Pilate's house when we hear Jesus has been taken there. Some nearly faint when Pilate sentences him to be crucified. After they lead him away to be flogged, we settle in to wait.

I had heard of the wonders Jesus worked. He was in great demand, so I thought. "I won't bother him. If I but touch his clothes, I will be well again."

So, I came up behind him in the crush of people and touched the fringe on his garment. I knew instantly something had changed. My body felt lighter. Then Jesus exclaimed, "Who touched me?" Peter, the man with him, said, "The crowd is pressing upon you. What do you mean, 'who touched me?'"

But Jesus turned and scanned the crowd, "I felt the power go out from me. I want to know who touched me." I was terrified, but his hand was gentle on mine as he helped me stand. He said, "My daughter, your faith has been the source of your healing. Be free and go in peace."

But now, as I heard the news of Jesus' death sentence, I went white to the lips. The grief in my face must have been terrible to behold. And I am ashamed to say that the first thought in my head was, "What will happen to us women when he is not here?" But then I thought, "No matter what, I am bound in blood with this man. He made holy mine and holy is the blood that will be spilled here today."

II
JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS



You free all daughters of Sarah bent from the weight of sin.
As you bend under the weight of the cross.

I can't believe they really are going to kill this innocent man. Why? He changed my life. He cured me! After 18 years of being bent almost double, 18 years of terrible pain, 18 years of being told it was because I was possessed of demons, 18 years of being alternately shunned and preached at, he set me free. It was Sabbath and I had gone to the synagogue to pray. It was usually my only outing of the week, since I rarely risked the scorn of the streets. I noticed him teaching when I entered and tried to listen without being noticed. To my dismay, he called to me. Then to my surprise, he put his hands on me. If he had done nothing more than that, it would have been enough. But he didn't stop there. He said, "You are rid of your infirmity." As he spoke a warmth flowed from his hands through my shoulders and down my spine. The pain vanished. Then he put his hand under my chin and lifted my head. As he did so, I stood up straight! Alleluias rang from my mouth as I looked skyward for the first time in years. I raised my arms over my head and praised God, for I knew from whence had come this blessing.

The officials were confused. But the people and I were not. We were filled with joy at his wonders and his words. I tried to kneel before him, but he stopped me, holding my hand. What we said then remains between the two of us.

But I will tell you this. I followed this man to Jerusalem, and I know, as I watch him take up his cross, that I will follow him anywhere, even to Calvary, and beyond.

III
JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME



You have heard our cries.
Even as you fall beneath the weight of our sins,
you have mercy on us.

When the women began keening, my heart is in my throat. This is dangerous! The Romans won't appreciate our public grief over the death of a man they have named a criminal. They might arrest all of us too. But these fears only last a second. Then my heart fills with admiration for the courage of the other women. I, too, lift my voice in protest and lament and walk with them behind the soldiers who surround Jesus and his terrible burden. The men have all disappeared, but we women will not leave his mother, and she will not leave him. I can't blame her. I, too, am a mother. I followed him from southern Phoenicia and I, too, will follow him to the death.

I am a Greek, by birth, a Syrophoenician, by religion, a Canaanite. The Jews call me a pagan. I am a foreigner in their culture, outside their God's covenant, and thus despised. But unlike many of them, I knew from the second I saw Jesus that this was a very special man. I recognized him as a holy man, and in my great need, threw myself at his feet. "Have mercy on me and my daughter, for she is possessed," I pleaded. Jesus didn't say anything, but I wouldn't give up. My daughter's life was at stake. Finally, some of the men with him said, "Give her what she wants. She is shouting at us; she will never go away." Jesus turned to me and said, "Is it fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs?" "Yes," I said immediately, "for the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the family table." Jesus smiled at me. "Great is your faith. Be it done as you desire."

Now as my daughter and I walk along behind him, our grief rings out against the walls of Jerusalem. My daughter gasps as we see him fall. His mother is standing at a turn in the street and her hands reach out, just as they must have done countless times when he was an infant learning to walk. He pushes himself up and staggers on. Would that I could give my life to spare his?

IV
JESUS MEETS HIS GRIEVING MOTHER



Body of my body, blood of my blood.
The blood of Christ, the Cup of Salvation.

I am standing next to his mother when he sees her. He had risen from his fall and walked only a few steps when he raised his head, as if she had called out to him, though she made no sound. I think my heart will break at the look of gentle compassion that appears on his face at the sight of her. She reaches out her hand and touches his cheek, cupping it with that tender gesture of mothers from the beginning of time. Their eyes, so alike, meet and hold. Neither of them weeps, although Mary's entire body looks broken with grief.

V

THE CROSS IS LAID ON SIMON OF CYRENE



Have mercy on me, for I am heavily burdened.

Let all my fear lose itself in your will.

I am standing with my husband, Simon of Cyrene, wondering what all the noise is about. We have just come into the city and have barely caught our breath, when suddenly a Roman soldier hails my husband. "You!" the soldier says, "Come here." They grab Simon and pull him into the street. As they do so, I see this poor wretch bent under the weight of a crossbeam. The soldiers order Simon to take the beam from him. I am afraid and angry – how dare they thrust Simon into this mess. Women are crying, as if this is an important man, not some common criminal. Simon is the important man, not this other. We are not part of this!

But Simon, who can't bear to see a donkey suffer, gently takes the beam from the poor man, saying as he does so, "I will bear your burden for a short while, sire." "Sire, why on earth would Simon call this criminal "sire?"

But then I see Simon's face, and I know something important is happening. Simon is a proud man, not given to honoring people without cause. And here he is bowing to this bloody wreck of a man as he takes the beam from him. I open my mouth to protest, but Simon, who knows me all too well, looks up and says, "All is well. Come follow us." Marveling, I do so, wondering how this will all ends.

VI
VERONICA WIPES JESUS' BROW



Woman and man, all are made in the image of God.
**Show us the light of your countenance,
and we shall be saved.**

I wait for him by the door. I know he will have to pass by here on the way to Golgotha. They all do, all the ones condemned to be crucified. And so, I wait, hoping I can give him some tiny bit of comfort . The Roman soldiers turn the corner at the bottom of my street and there he is. A richly dressed black man has been pressed into carrying the crossbeam – probably the soldiers are afraid Jesus will die before they can kill him! Jesus is already staggering on the steps of the narrow street and my heart breaks at the sight. As he slowly nears my door, I remove my veil and shove myself toward him.

To my surprise, the soldiers let me through. I bend beside him and put my veil to his face. He puts his hands over mine, holding the soft cloth to his face for a few seconds. Then he hands it back to me with a sigh and a small smile. A soldier grabs my shoulder and sets me aside, and Jesus continues on his slow painful way up the sloping street.

Tears begin to run down my face, and I lift my veil to wipe them away. As I look at my veil, I nearly scream, for there looking back at me is the true image of his face. I hold it to my heart, and weep.

VII
JESUS FALLS A SECOND TIME



From the little she had; she has put in everything.
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Even with the help of the man called Simon, he soon falls again. As he does, a great groan goes up from the women, and our keening grows louder. How different he is this day from the day I first encountered him in the Temple. I had gone to give my tiny mite into the Temple treasury, hoping it could help some other person in need. As I turned from doing this, I found him smiling at me. “Look”, he called out to the men with him. “This poor widow’s gift is worth far more than all the other contributions, for they gave of their abundance from the money they had left over, while she gives all the money she had from the little she has to live on.”

I had heard about this man’s teachings, but I had been too shy to get near enough to hear him. I had never had time to study very much, and I was afraid I would never be able to understand this great man’s teachings. But as I heard more that day, I realized that many of his teachings were like this – simple stories of everyday people telling us something new and important. So, I stayed to listen, and listening, discovered new depths in myself.

That’s why, when he fell again, I looked away, unable to bear the sight of his humiliation.

This man changed my life.

The least I can do is to be with him as they take his.

VIII

JESUS ADDRESSES THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM



All who pass by, look and see; is there any sorrow like my sorrow?

**Daughters, do not weep for me,
but weep for yourselves and for your children.**

When he painfully pulls himself up from where he has fallen, he sees our grieving group of women. His look causes us to fall silent. Then he speaks, his voice soft with pity.

“Daughters of Jerusalem do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are coming when people will say, ‘Blessed are those who are childless, blessed are the wombs that have never given birth and the breasts that have never nursed.’”

The words fall among us like burning brands. The crowded narrow street grows quiet as he speaks, and his voice seems to pick up volume as it bounces off the stone walls.

“Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us up!’ For if this is what they do when the wood is green, what will happen when the wood is dry?”

“What does it mean?” a woman whispers.

And I think, he is the green wood, still alive and with us, and these fools are killing him. If we can do this to this Godly man, what hope is there for us when we can no longer see him, or touch him, or hear him? I fall to my knees, moaning.

Around me, the women move on, the sound of their grief washing up like waves against the uncaring walls of the city.

IX
JESUS FALLS A THIRD TIME



Our bond with you strengthens our bond with one another.
You never abandon us to walk alone.

When they arrested Jesus, the men urged us all to go into hiding, fearing the Romans would do a general sweep of the area in an effort to catch all of us who followed him.

But his mother refused to leave. Hearing this, I told my husband Cleopas to go with the others. I would stay. Cleopas protested, fearing for me. But I told him that I would be safe, for the Romans would never suspect mere women of being dangerous. We agreed to meet later, in the upper room of the house where we had shared Passover Seder with Jesus the day before.

As I watched Cleopas leave, I realized it was the first time we had been apart in years, certainly since we had decided to follow Jesus. For the past year, we had traveled with him as he taught, watched over him as he slept, marveled at the miracles he performed, and wondered at the things he told us. Most of all, we loved him. Our bond with one another had been strengthened by our bond to him. It is that bond that endangers Cleopas. He has been seen with Jesus too often. But my womanhood renders me invisible to the Romans, to many of my own people as well. We Marys often had talked of this among ourselves, and reminded one another that our namesake, the prophet Miriam, also had been thrust into the background.

Each time Jesus falls, my heart breaks anew. When he came face to face with his stricken mother, I felt as if I were choking on wormwood and gall. And now, just as we approach the city gate, he falls again. My heart lurches, for he does not move. Is he dead? Is it over? Hope and grief war in my soul. But then one of the soldiers grabs a bucket from an old woman mopping a shop and pours dirty water over him. As he stirs, his mother groans. It isn't over yet. He rises and walks unsteadily out through the gate. We follow, walking toward Golgotha.

X

JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS



May our children sit beside you, and drink of your cup?
Do you know what you are asking?

As we walk through the city gate, and onto that dreary hillside, I think I may faint. This cannot be happening! When he fell that third time, I thought, "It is over. He is dead." And for a second, a mad hope possessed me. Maybe the suffering would end like this, instead of on that terrible travesty of a tree.

My two sons, James and John, had gone away with the other men, but I suspect John will soon return. He will never let Jesus die alone, even if it means risking his own arrest. Both my boys have been with Jesus from the time he called to them while they were mending the nets with my husband Zebedee in our family fishing boat on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

"What do you want?" he had asked me. "That these sons of mine may sit beside you, one on your right hand and one on your left, when you are in your kingdom." "You do not know what you are asking," he said gently. And turning to my sons, he asked, "Can you drink the cup that I will drink?" And they replied, "Yes, we can." "So be it," he said, "You shall drink my cup, but positions of power are not mine to give. They are awarded by God our Creator."

And now, as I watch him standing on this windswept hillside, I am realizing just how bitter this cup we all must drink will be.

The Roman soldiers set about their task methodically. Some of them begin preparing the cross while others strip him of his garments, dividing them among themselves, casting lots for his cloak. His poor abused body looks so frail as he stands there exposed to the jeers of the crowd. One soldier offers him some wine mingled with gall, but he turns his head away. I take his mother's hand, and someone takes mine. It is John, come to be with us at the end.

XI
JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS



Our hearts feel every blow of that hammer.
Your wounds are of our making.

As I watch them strip him and pull him down onto the cross, I long to scream, "Stop this madness! This is an innocent man! A good man!" I know. He saved my life. I was a maid in the household of an important merchant in Jerusalem, and young and foolish, I had been betrothed since I was a child to a man I had never seen. But the merchant's son convinced me he loved me. His mother found out and called me an adulteress. I was terrified.

At daybreak they dragged me to the Temple. There was a man sitting there, surrounded by people. The Temple officials threw me to the ground in front of him. I knew I already was a dead woman. They said, "Rabbi, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. The Law says we should stone her. Tell us, what do you say?"

I was confused, who was this man? Why were they asking him? What were they up to? The man ignored them, drawing with his finger in the dust near my face. But they kept at him, and he kept ignoring them. I finally calmed down enough to focus on what he was doing. There in the dust he had written the unspeakable name of God. What did this mean?

He looked up and said quietly, "Let the one among you who has not sinned be the first to throw a stone." Then, bending down, he drew some more in the dust, smiling sideways at me. One by one, those who had accused me silently slipped away, until he and I were alone. "Where have they gone?" he asked me. I said nothing, shaking my head in bewilderment. "Tell me, has no one condemned you?" he then asked. "No one, sir." I said softly. "Go now and sin no more" he said. And he helped me to my feet, smiled at me, turned me toward the door, and gave me a gentle nudge. "Go," he said with a smile. Jesus had given me back my life. I would now give it to him.

And now these fools are going to kill him! My heart feels every blow of that hammer. As they jerk his feet together, I fall, driven to the ground in grief.

XII

JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS



And I know if my grief were a river,
the whole earth would drown.

Even in this moment of complete vulnerability, he is magnificent! As I look at him through eyes blurred with tears, he is no longer just one man, but seems instead to embody all of suffering humankind. Could any human endure such a burden? I would die in his place without a moment's regret. That they should touch one hair on that adored head, hurt one inch of that beloved body, sickens me with grief and rage. I have loved him forever, it seems, even though I met him only three years ago, when he was teaching near my home in Magdala. I knew from the moment we first spoke that he had loved me from before I was born.

I would have loved him even if he had not cured me of my affliction, taken from my that deep seated sadness that had clouded my days. I seemed to always walk in darkness. I yearned to end this soul-eating pain. Then I met him, and the sun rose in my life. With a glance, he removed the pall of sadness that had dragged my life in the dust. With a touch he lifted me into a realm of spiritual brightness that dazzled my eyes and delighted my soul! "My peace is upon you forever" he once said to me. I cling to those words as they stretch him out on that dreadful cross. I brush tears from my eyes and see more clearly what they are about to do. Oh Holy One, help us! And for a terrible interminable time, we wait, as he slowly weakens. Finally, I hear him give himself to his father. Without looking, I know he is gone from me. And I know if my grief were a river, the whole earth would drown.

Musical Offering

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

XIII

JESUS' BODY IS LAID IN THE ARMS OF HIS MOTHER



“Do not call me Naomi, which means Pleasant.
Call me Mara, which means Bitter:
for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.

As I waited in pain for him to be born, now I wait in pain for him to die. I cannot take my eyes off him, for every second that passes takes him farther from me. Where is my bright angel now? I would be the God-bearer, the angel said. Well, I did my part. And now here he is, this Child of God, dying in a dismal dusty place.

Anger washing through me, followed by new waves of grief. For days I have been an ocean, wracked by storms of emotion that threaten to drown my soul, kill my faith. This is too much to ask of me. Beloved! I believed Your promise. I believed them when I pushed him into the world with only Joseph and the animals as midwives. I believed them when the shepherds and the kings came. I believed them when my angel warned Joseph to take us into Egypt. And I believed them when, at the Temple, he disappeared. I feared You had already taken him from me then, much too soon.

But this! Oh Beloved, is this necessary! Must our child suffer so? We are not worthy of such pain. Take him! Take him now, before I go mad with rage and pain.

"It is finished." Then he cries out to you, Beloved. "Abba, into Your hands I commend my spirit." He drops his head, and his eyes meet mine. And as I watch, the light dies.

I sink down on a rock, and with a curious gentleness, the soldiers hand him to me, draping him across my lap. I have no tears left. My eyes are spent with weeping, my soul is in tumult, my heart is poured out in grief because of the downfall of my people.

John says something to me, and I look up, my eyes blazing. "Do not call me Naomi, which means Pleasant. Call me Mara, which means Bitter; for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." Agony forces my head back and I scream at the heavens.

XIV

JESUS' BODY IS PLACED IN THE TOMB.



Sorrowful Mother, all humanity shares your loss.

**Bless us all, Womb of Humanity,
and renew our journey into new life.**

I press my broken son to me. Oh Beloved! Have mercy on me! Pour Your tender mercies down upon me and help me!

And once again, You send my bright angel. I feel the warmth on my back, the angel's hand upon my bent head, and hear the familiar voice: "Mary, Blessed of all Women, do not be afraid, for God is pleased with you." And I remember the Promise: "All will be well. All manner of things will be well."

I allow them to take my son's body from me. They are telling me it is time to prepare him for burial. And so, I go through the ritual motions. The smell of the sweet herbs fills the air. For one last time, I kiss his mortal face, then gently cover it with the sheet of fine white fabric.

I have no bitterness left. My heart already is looking ahead. We walk outside, and James and John push the great stone over the entrance. I stand looking at the tomb.

How long, oh Beloved, how long? As my dear friends move about me, peace settles on me. I am again one with Your will. Let it happen as you say.

Concluding Prayer

Jesus our Teacher,

Remind us always when we walk in darkness
Especially in the darkness of sin,
That in your death there was promise of light.

Jesus our Brother.

Comfort us with your powerful mercy,
And give us strength to reach out in love,
Even to the unlovable.

Jesus our Savior,

Remind us that we do not live or die for self alone.
Rather we live and die for you.
That is why you came among us, why you died,
And why you live again.

Jesus, Child of God,

Remind us that we all, women and men,
Are Children of God.
Give us courage to welcome
The unimaginable event that awaits us all.
And at the end, give us peace.
Amen.

Musical Offering: *Crucifixion*

WORSHIP MINISTERS

Liturgical Artist

Kathy Varner

Soloists

Michelle DiBona Trefren, Daniel Klein

Instrumentalists

Michelle DiBona Trefren, *organ*

Mark van Schenkhof, *organ*

Lectors

Starr Ariola

Susan Briggs

Samantha Davis

Melisa Dotson

Nichol Free

Rev. Dana Blouch-Hanson

Donna Harpster

The Rev. Barbara Hutchinson

The Rev. Canon Betsey Ivy

Christina Luo

Susan Sanders

Jean Shepherd

Lisa Turchi

Kathy Varner

Mary Beth Williams

Lisa Woolley

We continue our service tomorrow evening with the pre-recorded service of the Great Vigil of Easter.