

# Walking the Way of the Cross

Christian M. Paolino

## Introduction

**Leader:** As shadows fall, we gather, while still yet scattered. On our couches or at tables instead of in pews, not together but neither alone, we recall that profoundest of days when Christ bore the ultimate price for love for humankind. Then as now, fear lurked just outside as disciples took shelter and pondered the days ahead. Then as now, faith was and is the light in our darkness, as we place ourselves and those we love in God's care.

## Opening Prayer

**Leader:** God is with you.

**Response:** And also with you

**Leader:** Will you pray with me?

*If you are in an on-line group, pray the following together with microphones muted:*

**Creator God**

**Blessed is your name**

**here and everywhere.**

**May your vision be realized and your plan fulfilled**

**in this world as in the next.**

**Provide us, we pray, with what this day will demand,**

**mercy when we fall short of our potential**

**and grace when we are disappointed by those we love;**

**strength in the face of temptation**

**and guidance from darkness into your light.**

**Leader:** Deliver us from every evil and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy, keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety, as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Response:** Honor, glory and praise are yours, now and always. Amen.

## The First Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death

Matthew 27: 24-26

*For a longer reading, use Matthew 27:11-26*

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

When Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.' Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!' So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

## Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, we sit in Pilate's chair  
in courtroom, and conference room, and classroom;  
in our reaction to ideas that challenge us;  
in our habits that recklessly threaten the common good;  
when we feel wronged as others act out of selfishness or fear;  
when we "wash our hands" as injustice befalls those whose cares we deem as far from our own.

Teach us, we pray, to see your face in those whose lives we change,  
that our words and our actions might bring about the promised realm of peace.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God  
Holy and Mighty  
Holy Immortal One  
Have mercy upon us**

## The Second Station: Jesus Takes Up His Cross

Matthew 16:24-25

*For a longer reading, use Matthew 16:24-27*

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

## Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, some days we stand in a field of crosses,  
in the waiting room, on the unemployment line, at the grocery;

in the relentless onslaught of the news cycle;  
between the impatience of the young, and the frailties of the old;  
as anxiety threatens to consume us;  
when we want to snap at those whom we love, out of frustration or fatigue;  
when we wish it went back to being “someone else’s problem.”

Remind us, we pray, that you know the crosses of our lives as if they were your own  
and to trust your hands to keep the weight from crushing us.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

## The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

Isaiah 53: 5-6

*For a longer reading, use Isaiah 53:4-7, 11*

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

### Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, what are we to learn from these days?  
What portend do we take from this, our exile?  
What can the drive-through testing center, the hospital tent, the empty airport, teach us?  
When a simple embrace can be deadly  
and shortage, isolation, and hardship loom long into the distance  
what form does the Body of Christ need to assume?

Guide us, we pray, to understand how best to carry your love into places we dare not  
physically go, that all who work, or watch, or weep this night might know your comfort.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

## The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets his Afflicted Mother

Lamentations 1: 10-11

*For a longer reading, use Lamentations 1:1-4, 10-11*

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see  
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me,  
which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.

### Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, you taught us that with love comes risk of loss.  
Watching a loved one suffer is about the hardest thing to face,  
and yet, your mother loved you fiercely and braved the crowds to see you stagger by.  
She had been warned by the Archangel that this day would come,  
and nevertheless, she said, “Be it done to me according to thy word.”  
Son of Mary, give us the courage to love despite the cost.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God  
Holy and Mighty  
Holy Immortal One  
Have mercy upon us**

## The Fifth Station: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus

2 Timothy 2: 10

*For a longer reading, use 2 Timothy 2: 8-13*

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the  
salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

## Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, as a man, your body approached its breaking point and a passerby—a stranger, really—was compelled by the soldiers to ease your burden. Did he argue, or drag his feet, as we do?

Today, our sisters and brothers bear new crosses of all sizes as work dries up, as supplies run low, as neighbors get desperate, as authorities demand we alter the patterns of our lives. Encourage us to help shoulder the load, knowing it is your effort that we share.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God  
Holy and Mighty  
Holy Immortal One  
Have mercy upon us**

## The Sixth Station: A Woman Wipes the Face of Jesus

Matthew 25: 40

*For a longer reading, use Matthew 25:31-46*

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

## Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, our culture asserts that our neighbor looks like us, talks like us, thinks like us. Flag and symbol, slogan and creed, teach us who is “in” and who is “out.” When crisis strikes, our instincts tell us “we take care of our own.” Thus, we are confounded by the Gospel call to share your abundance, to disregard stature or brand, to sacrifice prestige or even security for love of the stranger. Is it not the fast that we choose, to welcome the poor and comfort the afflicted, to follow the example of volunteers, social workers, and aides when not even the cross was too great a price to pay for us?

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God  
Holy and Mighty  
Holy Immortal One  
Have mercy upon us**

## The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls a Second Time

Isaiah 63:9

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

In all their distress.  
It was no messenger or angel  
but his presence that saved them;  
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;  
he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

### Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, who recognized and cast out the demons of many,  
See us now, jonesing for a meeting, detouring past the liquor store,  
staring at a credit card.  
In anxious times, old habits return, temptations linger, resolve falters.  
Left to our own devices, we are easy marks.  
Gentle Savior, turn us to you.  
Incline us to healthy distractions, trusted mentors, helping others,  
And, most importantly, remind us of your unconditional love,  
your outstretched hand, ready to lift us back onto trembling feet again.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God  
Holy and Mighty  
Holy Immortal One  
Have mercy upon us**

## The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

Luke 23: 28

*For a longer reading, use Luke 23:27-31*

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”

### Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, it feels like the days you describe are here.  
There is no safety in a loved one’s embrace,  
no reassurance in a neighbor’s touch.  
We huddle indoors, often alone, worrying and waiting for the next bad news.

Help us learn and heal, even as we worry and grieve.  
Give us the strength to support one another in the days ahead.  
Remind us that fasting from contact does not mean fasting from kindness.  
Let our words and actions in these moments remind the world of you.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God  
Holy and Mighty  
Holy Immortal One  
Have mercy upon us**

## The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls a Third Time

Hebrews 4:15-16

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

### Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, we see our neighbors stumbling around us.  
Many are sick, some seriously.  
Others are afraid, taking selfish actions in their fear.  
Still others are foolish, choosing not to see the impact of their choices.

Give us the strength to let go of that which we cannot control.  
Help us find comfort in new patterns and altered routines.  
Give us patience as we all adapt as best we can.  
And, mostly, help us find serenity in knowing we've done the best we can.  
Save us from the sin of despair.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

## The Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

John 19: 24

*For a longer reading, use John 19: 23-24*

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

“They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

### Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, you allowed yourself to be dehumanized for us, reduced to a “social problem” and debased as a warning to others. Help us to never lose sight of the real lives behind the statistics, each as precious to you as the next. Never let us grow callous or numb to a pair of frightened eyes. Remind us that they are your own.

V. Will you strive for justice and peace, and uphold the dignity of every human being?

**R. I will, with God's help.**

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**



## The Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Luke 23: 43

*For a longer reading, use Luke 23: 33-43*

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

### Reflections

**Leader:** Jesus, suffering knows no logic, no justice.  
We see kind people endure brutal affliction  
while others seemingly face no consequences for their callous actions.

From the detention center, the quarantine, the reservation,  
we recall how you, born without sin, died a criminal’s death.  
Give us the strength to persevere in a broken world  
that one day we, too, may rejoice with you in the company of saints.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God  
Holy and Mighty  
Holy Immortal One  
Have mercy upon us**

## The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

John 19: 30

*For a longer reading, use John 19:28-30*

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

*We pause for a time in silence*

### Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, what is there left to say  
to a God who would be humbled before all creation, even unto death, for love of us?

What offerings could we bring to this crude altar, what sacrifices would compare?  
We stand with empty hands, offering nothing but our fragile flawed selves.

*We pause for a time in silence.*

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

## The Thirteenth Station: The Body of Jesus is Taken Down

John 19: 40

*For a longer reading, use John 19: 38-40*

*The leader, or someone the leader invites, reads the passage:*

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.

### Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, in these days we know too well the fragility of life.  
Be it one or a thousand, each soul is precious to you.  
Remind us to treat one another with dignity, no matter the circumstances.  
Following Joseph's example, let us respect all those you love.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God**  
**Holy and Mighty**  
**Holy Immortal One**  
**Have mercy upon us**

## The Fourteenth Station: Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

Matthew 27: 59, 61

*For a longer reading, use Matthew 27: 59, 61*

Joseph rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

## Reflection

**Leader:** Jesus, your earthly body, having completed its work, was taken from us.  
Grief robs us of words, and we turn to silent acts of care—  
a delivered meal, flowers, a look, a touch that can speak volumes  
We have faith that you are with us in times of joy and sadness.  
Embody us to bring your healing love to all who mourn.

**Leader:.** Eternal rest grant unto them

**Response:.** And may light perpetual shine upon them

**Leader:** May they rest in peace

**Response:** May their souls, and the souls of all the faithful departed, by thy mercy, rest in peace.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Holy God**

**Holy and Mighty**

**Holy Immortal One**

**Have mercy upon us**

## Concluding Prayers

**Leader:** Jesus, as darkness fell, your tribe of followers waited, as we wait,  
for the next chapter to begin.

Turn us now, again, to one another, with grace and compassion  
to ease each other's burden, to care for those whom the world forgets.  
For as you willed it, there is no greater love than this, to lay down one's own life  
for the sake of neighbor and friend.  
We lift the yoke, today and always, and soldier on in memory of you.

*Online groups pray together with microphones muted:*

**Creator God**

**We thank you for the life of Jesus your Son  
who walked among us, transformed us,  
and showed us the pathway to true joy.  
Even as we remember his death,**

**we celebrate his resurrection,  
and even as we await his return in glory,  
we strive to bring about your realm on earth.  
To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit  
be glory, honor, and praise, tonight and always. Amen.**

**Leader:** The spirit of the living God be upon us this night...

**Response:** ... and on our absent sisters and brothers. Amen.

Scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicized Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Prayers and Reflections ©2020 Christian M. Paolino. May be used as published in its entirety with attribution. No unauthorized redistribution or sale.

Donations to Episcopal Relief & Development and RENEW International are welcomed.