

No Greater Love

Stations of the Cross for Young People

Love is important to all of us. We spend our time on earth engaged in so many activities, but in the end, it all comes down to love. We are seeking a place in life where we can safely love and be loved. We were made for love, and we all hope for a love that never ends and that accepts us just as we are.

What is love, though? The wrong idea of love can take us down sad or even dangerous paths. The Stations of the Cross are, above everything else, about love. When we journey with Jesus on the Way of the Cross, we learn what real love is, what it requires of us and how it gives us hope for the future.

The Gospel of John tells us that at the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples that they were no longer servants, but friends of his—which means friends of God. “No one has greater love than this,” he said, “To lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” In this Way of the Cross we see what this “laying down” means for Jesus—and for us.

— Amy Welborn

Prayer Before the Altar

Jesus, love has brought me here today. I am alive because of love. I can stand here in hope and courage because of the love I know you have for me. I’m here because I love you and want to be more like you.

I try hard to follow your voice in my heart and share your love with others. Sometimes I don’t, though. Sometimes I take the gift of my life for granted. Sometimes I forget that everyone I meet is your beloved child, too. I cut myself off from others and from you. I cut myself off from life.

But even then, you don’t stop loving me. You want me to return to you. You reach out like a shepherd, like a father waiting for his prodigal son. When I look at your image here on the cross, I see that love. I see love poured out for your friends. Help me to rejoice in your friendship and accept the love and forgiveness that you share with all your friends. Teach me to love as you love, as I walk with you on that way of great love, the Way of the Cross.

FIRST STATION

Jesus Is Condemned to Die

Meditation

Jesus stands before those who hold his earthly life in their hands. He knows suffering lies ahead. He could lie about himself and escape that suffering. He tells the truth, though, because he loves us, and Love stands for truth.

Prayer

Jesus, so many times trying to be truthful seems just too hard. If I’m completely truthful about my sins, I will have to suffer consequences for my wrongdoing. If I’m completely honest about my plans, I may face restrictions that will keep me from doing what I want. If I’m really open about who I am and what I think, some people might change the way they think of me. They might decide I’m not very good or something.

In this first station, I see you stand before your accusers in truth, out of love. Help me be led by love, too. May knowing that you love me as I am strengthen me to be honest about myself. May my love for others help me see that they deserve the truth from me.

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To lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

(John 15:13)

SECOND STATION

Jesus Carries His Cross

Meditation

Jesus has been beaten and mocked by the Roman guards. Now a huge, heavy beam is laid brutally on his shoulders. Jesus carries the great weight of sin as he begins his journey to Golgotha, where they would crucify him. He bears it willingly, for love bears all things.

Prayer

Jesus, I may be young, but I've already learned that life brings many challenges and burdens. In a way, these burdens are our own crosses that all people must carry through life.

Sometimes, I condemn myself to carry a cross. I get myself into tough situations that have tough consequences. But at other times, life just lays a heavy cross on my shoulders. I didn't ask for it. I don't want it. But it's there, and it's hard to bear—especially because I don't understand why it's there.

I see you carry your cross out of love. Help me see a purpose in the cross I'm carrying today. Help me find a loving way to bring good out of this cross.

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(John 15:13)

THIRD STATION

Jesus Falls the First Time

Meditation

The streets of Jerusalem are narrow and winding. Crowds have gathered to watch Jesus make his way to the place of crucifixion. Under the weight of the cross and pressed by the crowds, Jesus stumbles and falls.

Prayer

Jesus, the cross you carry is not just made of wood. It is made of the sadness of the world's sin and all its consequences in human suffering. That is a heavy burden to carry, and under its weight, you fall.

Sin brings me down to the ground, too. I may think I can handle it at first, but after a while, I find that my lies or my casual cruelty or my closed heart is making it hard for me to walk upright. I fall.

I see you fall under all the weight, but I also see that you refuse to let the heaviness of the world's sin keep you down. You rise and keep walking out of love. Help me to rise, too, and find the path of love once again.

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(John 15:13)

FOURTH STATION

Jesus Meets His Mother

Meditation

When Jesus was a baby, his parents took him to the Temple. There, a prophet told Mary that a sword would pierce her soul. Seeing her beloved son now wounded, weak and walking to an unjust death, Mary feels that

sword tear at her heart.

Prayer

Jesus, amid the crowd filled with mocking, curious and indifferent faces, one face stands out. It is the face of your sorrowful mother, Mary. She held you close as a baby, searched for you when she thought you were lost in Jerusalem and was there with you as you changed water into wine.

As she has so often in the past, Mary stands near you now. But this moment is different from all the others. She can do nothing for you now; she can only watch in grief because she loves you so very much.

I suppose all parents must sometimes look at their own children with this same kind of sadness. When we are sick, when we are running down harmful paths, when we refuse to listen, our parents feel it, because they love us.

I see you stop to give your mother comfort. Help me stop on my journey and let my parents in to give me comfort. Help me love them by being open to their love and support.

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(John 15:13)

FIFTH STATION

Simon Helps Jesus

Meditation

The cross only gets heavier with every step. The guards pull a man named Simon out of the crowd and put the crushing weight of the cross on his shoulders. Not that they care about Jesus, but they have a job to do. They have to get him to the place of crucifixion.

Prayer

Jesus, I wonder if the man named Simon knew you at all. He wasn't one of the twelve disciples. Maybe he had never even heard of you before that day.

He didn't volunteer to help you, either; he was forced into it by armed soldiers. But despite all that—despite being a stranger pulled in to help against his will, for a moment, a burden on you was lifted.

Every day, my life puts me in the presence of people I've never met before and never will see again—at school, at work, at the mall, at a game.

As I see your burden lifted by a stranger, help me remember that every action and word I speak to a stranger can either lighten their daily load or make it heavier. Help me approach them with love. And help me gratefully accept any kind-nesses that are offered to me.

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(John 15:13)

SIXTH STATION

Veronica Wipes Jesus' Face

Meditation

After Jesus was arrested, the guards put a crown of thorns on his head. The long, sharp thorns pierced the skin on his scalp and drew blood. Now hours later, the blood, sweat and filth have covered Jesus' face. Veronica reaches out in love.

Prayer

Jesus, I must admit that suffering frightens me. I don't mean just the idea of my own suffering, but it's the suffering of others that I find difficult to face.

I don't like to see people I love in pain. When someone I know endures great suffering, it is hard to know what to say or do. Sometimes when I'm faced with that kind of suffering, I just want to go far away until it's all over. Sometimes people are changed by illness or the pains of age or grief. It's hard to recognize them under the scars of their pain.

I see Veronica reaching out to you. Others are frightened off by your suffering. Some don't know what to do or say. Veronica sees through the blood and the dirt. She does a simple thing. She cleans your face. Help me reach out as Veronica did and not be overcome by my fear. Help me be strengthened by love to recognize your face in the suffering of others.

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(John 15:13)

SEVENTH STATION

Jesus Falls the Second Time

Meditation

Just a few days ago, people were cheering when Jesus entered this city. The feeling is different now. Now Jesus is condemned as a criminal and hardly anyone seems to be on his side. He falls again. Does anyone care?

Prayer

Jesus, I see people fall every day.

Kids I know struggle in school. They make mistakes. They lose games and forget their lines on stage. They have family problems and dread going home at night.

My parents get stressed out because of all the things they have to do. They lose their temper with me. Sometimes I deserve it, sometimes I don't.

When I think about all of this, sometimes I feel let down by the way people disappoint me. I watch them fall, and it makes me angry or feel superior or even laugh at them.

I see you surrounded by pressures and cruelty, falling down under the weight of all of it. I'm sorry to see you fall. When I see other people fall in my life, help me remember you and be more understanding with them. When those I know fall, help me react with compassion and desire to help. May love move me to care.

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(John 15:13)

EIGHTH STATION

Jesus Meets the Women

Meditation

As Jesus preached and taught during his ministry, his apostles were at his side. Now, they are gone, nowhere to be seen. But along the sad road, a small group follows Jesus. It is a cluster of women from Jerusalem, walking behind him in tears for what he has endured and for his death that comes closer with every step.

Prayer

Jesus, although you are exhausted and weak, you have strength enough to speak to the women who are weeping for you. You tell them not to shed tears for you, but for themselves and for their children. Following you can sometimes be difficult.

I know that real love can be hard sometimes. Forgiving is hard. Putting up with someone's mistakes and weakness is hard. It is hard being faithful to a friend or family member and supporting them when I have other

things to do or when the situation makes me feel uncomfortable. Being your friend, Jesus, can be a challenge.
I see you gently warning the women of hard times ahead. I listen to those words and understand what they mean for me. Help me to be faithful, and to keep following you in love.

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(John 15:13)

NINTH STATION
**Jesus Falls
a Third Time**

Meditation

Jesus has been arrested, unjustly condemned, whipped and beaten. He has been forced to bear the means of his own death on his back. His friends have disappeared. He falls again.

Prayer

Jesus, your journey on this hard road is a journey of pain and struggle, but most of all, it is a journey of love. It is hard to see this from the outside. Someone who doesn't understand sees nothing but a shattered man falling under a terrible load on a Jerusalem street.

But there is more to it than this, I know. There is love. You endure all of this because you love us. You suffer because you love me. It's hard for me to fully realize that love involves suffering. I doubt anybody truly understands the mystery of how love and suffering are joined. But through your journey, I see how true this connection is.

I see you fall, broken and weak. But in this pain, I also see a love that astonishes me and gives me hope. Help me love as you love. Help me accept the suffering that comes with real love.

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(John 15:13)

TENTH STATION
**Jesus Is
Stripped of
His Garments**

Meditation

Jesus has passed through the city gates, out to the place of the crucifixion called Golgotha. Wooden beams are stuck in the ground, awaiting the crosspiece that he has been carrying on his back. On this hill that means "skull place," he is stripped of his clothes. All is ready.

Prayer

Jesus, you came into the world to share the Good News of God's love. You forgave sins, healed the sick and brought the dead back to life.

And now you stand, God made human, totally exposed to the world, the world that came into being through your own word, a world that has now turned on you and is preparing to put you to death on a cross.

How could they not have recognized you? How can people be so blind to goodness and love? Why does it scare us so?

I see you, the Lord of Creation, standing weak and vulnerable before your own creation which has closed its

eyes to truth. Open my eyes to your love. Help me be open to the many ways you are acting in my life every day. Help me to respond to your voice as it calls me to love.

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ELEVENTH STATION

Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

Meditation

The noonday sun burns down on Golgotha. Nails are pounded through Jesus' wrists. Ropes quickly pull the crosspiece up into place. More nails pierce Jesus, now through his feet. The cross is in place, bearing Love.

Prayer

Jesus, is this really what love looks like?

That's not what the world tells me. The world outside tells me that love is about happy feelings, romance and pleasure. As you hang on the cross, surrounded by people mocking you, gambling for your clothes, giving you vinegar when you say you are thirsty, it changes the way I think about love.

I see you suffering on the cross, suffering so much that you cry out to the Father. I also see you are suffering for one reason only: you love us. You want to pour out forgiveness of sins and open the doors to eternal life—for us. So you accepted this cup of suffering, out of love. Help me see love in this cross. Help me see how much I need this love. Teach me, through your cross, how to love as you have loved. Teach me that true love is what I have been made for.

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TWELFTH STATION

Jesus Dies on the Cross

Meditation

Jesus hangs on the cross as the hours creep by. It is harder and harder for him to breathe. One of the thieves crucified alongside mocks him; the other defends him. Jesus promises this good thief that today, he would be in paradise with him. After three hours, Jesus breathes his last.

Prayer

Jesus, forgive me for my sins.

All along the way, there were many people involved in bringing you to this point. Some betrayed you, others arrested, tried and convicted you, some whipped you or nailed you to the cross. Hundreds stood by and watched. All but a few of your friends abandoned you and hid.

But beyond all this, a whole ungrateful world brought you to Golgotha. And, sadly, I have to admit that I'm a part of that world.

I see you collapsed and lifeless on the cross. Sin is there with you. But your response to sin was not anger or rejection of the world. You accepted the whole world and everything about it, even its sinfulness, in order to heal it. I'm a part of that world. Help me see that through your cross, I am healed and set free.

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THIRTEENTH STATION

Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross

Meditation

For a moment, the world went dark. Thunder rolled across Jerusalem and the earth shook. Something had happened. The world had changed. But now, no one knows that. The guards have left the crucified to his family. A tomb is made ready. In deep sadness, those remaining watch Mary cradle her son in her arms.

Prayer

Jesus, this moment at Golgotha is even more dark and bleak than the others.

Those who were caring for your lifeless body probably had many thoughts just at this moment. They might have been thinking of your laughter and wisdom, of a time they had shared a meal with you, or of a moment when you had assured them that their sins—even their worst sins—were forgiven. Your mother Mary must have thought about all that had been promised—and once again, the sword pierced her heart.

All of them were probably confused and hurt, wondering what would, what could happen next. But in the midst of this enormous pain, they continued to serve you, quietly, out of love.

I see you cared for by those who love you. Help me do the same. Help me serve humbly and quietly, out of love.

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(John 15:13)

FOURTEENTH STATION

Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

Meditation

In a cave in the side of a hill, Jesus' body, wrapped in linens, is laid on a shelf carved from the rock, and a stone is rolled across the opening of this tomb. Guards are stationed, and the mourners drift away. Night falls with a heavy silence.

Prayer

Jesus, dying is a scary thing.

It is sad to reflect on your unjust death. It is scary to think about my own death and the deaths of those around me. I just don't like to think about such things. Could a stone rolled across a tomb, darkness and silence, could this really be the end?

Your journey to the cross seems to end in sadness. Sometimes when I am trying to understand and to follow your way of love, I feel frustrated and sad, too. It's hard for me to see the point, or to see how good could come out of it.

I see you lying in the tomb, and faith tells me that death is not the end. As I watch in sadness, help me remember your promise of eternal life. Help me live, trusting that in your love lies joy and peace.

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Closing Prayer

Jesus, on this Way of the Cross, I have seen the way of love. I have seen that love is brave, compassionate and truthful. I have seen, through your journey, that the mystery of genuine love involves sacrifice and suffering.

It is a way of sadness, but amid the sadness, I remember your words. I remember that throughout your ministry, you constantly spoke of eternal life. You said that when we were reborn, we would live forever, that when we eat the Bread of Life, we would never hunger again. You promised the thief beside you that he would

live with you forever in paradise.

May this Way of the Cross strengthen that same hope in me. I know that you are with me at all times, walking with me, as I have walked with you here. Your way has taught me that there is no greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends. Help me be your friend, now and forever. Amen.