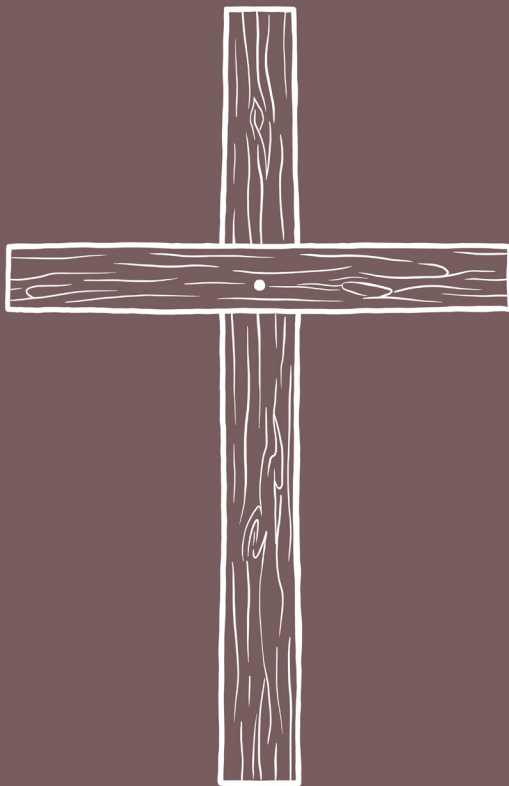


RENEW | SEASON OF LENT



SEASONAL GUIDE

———— STATIONS OF THE CROSS ————

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCING SEASONAL GUIDE

There are fourteen traditional stations of the cross, each marking a moment in the journey of Jesus on the day of his crucifixion. These stations, usually represented by a series of images, invite us to walk with Jesus on the day his death brought new life.

The earliest form of the stations of the cross were found through the 12th to 14th centuries, as a physical pilgrimage in Jerusalem. Each station began as a halting-place, an opportunity to take a break. Pilgrims would stop, rest and take time to reflect in the midst of their pilgrimage.

In this same way, as we embark on this Lenten season, we are invited to stop, rest and take

time to reflect in the middle of our busy lives. We are invited to reflect on the significance of each aspect of a single day from the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, to his death on the cross and his burial. We are invited to experience the heat of the day, notice the grief of Jesus' disciples and feel the weight of the cross.

It is no coincidence that the stations of the cross, both then and now, are often marked by physical journeys. We walk around stations of beautiful artwork set up in churches and stop at each station to imagine and reflect on what it would have been like to be there. We are, as Henri Nouwen said about the stations of the cross, called to walk with Jesus on his last day.

It is also important to note that the last station of this seasonal guide is Jesus' burial. Many stations of the cross, including the fourteen traditional stations, do not end with Jesus' resurrection. This is not because we don't believe in the resurrection, but rather it emphasises the entwined sorrow and hope that comes with this journey. With hindsight, we know that Jesus rose again from that tomb. However, Jesus' disciples and followers sat for three days after watching their Messiah be tortured and crucified.

As Padraig O'Tuama so aptly says about the stations of the cross: 'The idea is to find hope in the practice of what seemed to be the worst. And it is the worst. There's no pretence that abduction and torture and murder are anything other than abduction, torture, and murder. However, there is the understanding that, within it, we can discover some kind of hope — the hope of protest, the

hope of truth-telling, the hope of generosity, the hope of gesture — even in those places.'

So as we walk with Jesus along these stations of the cross and this period of Lent, let us ask where we can find hope in this worst day.

JESUS IS TEMPTED IN THE GARDEN

— Luke 22:39-46 —

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.' Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.' Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.'



REFLECTIONS

It's late, dark. Jesus has finished a meal with his closest friends, and now he is heading to pray in his usual place.

He has faced temptation before. Years ago he was taken to a high place and shown all the world's kingdoms by the accuser who said to him, 'all of this I will give you if you bow down and worship me'. A tempting offer. The whole mission would have been accomplished without his sacrifice. It must have felt easier on the mountain top to turn down the offer. The time for him to go to the cross was still many years away. But in the garden, knowing precisely what the dawn would bring, the temptation to bow down to the usurper and accept the deal must have felt like air to a suffocating man.

Tonight, in the dark, he could run and hide. He could take the deal, trade one God for a counterfeit and save his life. He could stoke the crowd, start a revolution and win the day with violence. All these options would be more comfortable, more desirable. Instead, he knelt before the God of the universe, and poured out his fear, hopes and desires, surrendering the future to his Father's wisdom.

Lent is an opportunity for us to join the disciples as they pray and lament with Jesus in the garden. The same options sit before us. As we approach the dawn will we have bowed down to a new master – money, pleasure, fame or power? Will we run and hide? Will we slip through the crowd to avoid facing them?

REFLECTIONS

Will we unleash violence of all kinds on others and avoid facing our fragility?

see Jesus' revolution of justice and peace break through in our world?

Or will we surrender our comfort and desires to the Father, to

QUESTIONS

- 01 What stood out to you about this station describing the temptation of Jesus?
- 02 Have you experienced a situation where you were faced with a tempting option which seemed easier than one God was calling you to?
- 03 Spend a couple of minutes in silence / listening to God. How do you think the Holy Spirit might be leading you today?

JESUS IS BETRAYED AND DENIED

— Luke 22: 47-48 & 60-62 —

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?'

But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are talking about!' At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.



REFLECTIONS

Whenever Judas is mentioned in the gospels it always comes with an epithet: ‘Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor’ or ‘Judas, who betrayed him’. Like a children’s book villain, the reader is told with every appearance that Judas will betray Jesus. And we know the story, we know that this is what does happen.

But in the garden, as Judas greets Jesus with a kiss, flanked by soldiers and Pharisees ready to take him away, Jesus calls Judas ‘friend’ (Matthew 26:50). Jesus knows what is happening, knows what this moment means, knows where it will take them both, and he still calls Judas ‘friend’.

If Jesus knew what would happen to him in the early moments of his ministry, then he called the disciples knowing about Peter’s denial and Judas’ betrayal. Both betrayals are foretold by Jesus and

happen as he says they would, and both are recorded in the gospels to be followed by remorse and shame. Jesus asks these men to follow him, knowing their failings, their moments of great faith and great doubt. He would know that his call to follow him, to walk and work and rest and eat alongside him would lead to a lonely, shame-filled death for Judas, and to Peter’s renewed faith and spread of the gospel after Pentecost.

Peter and Judas are two of the people in Jesus’ inner circle, those that he trusts most deeply and has shared his Father’s will with. But in the moment where Jesus feels most alone as he prepares to go to the cross, his friends abandon him and turn him over to the authorities. And yet, Jesus chooses them, and when he is laid out on the cross, he asks of his Father, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do

REFLECTIONS

not know what they are doing’. This prayer includes Judas; it includes Peter; it includes us.

The unwavering love and grace of Jesus is a thread that weaves its way through the valleys in the lives of Judas and Peter. We can see ourselves in this. In the times we feel we’ve betrayed and denied God, we can remember

that Jesus chose Judas and Peter. In this same way, God chooses us and weaves his love and grace into our lives. This Lent, there is an invitation to look to the betrayal and denial of Jesus and be uplifted by the overflowing and abundant grace of Christ.

QUESTIONS

- 01 What stood out to you about this station describing the betrayal of Jesus?
- 02 Where is God inviting you to remember the overflowing love and grace of Jesus and what does this mean for your life?
- 03 Spend a couple of minutes in silence / listening to God. How do you think the Holy Spirit might be leading you today?

JESUS IS MOCKED AND CONDEMNED

— Luke 22:63-65 & 23:18-25 —

The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and demanded, “Prophesy! Who hit you?” And they said many other insulting things to him.

But the whole crowd shouted, ‘Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!’ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.) Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ For the third time he spoke to them: ‘Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.’



REFLECTIONS

But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

This passage is so powerfully contemporary. We follow Jesus as he is abused while awaiting trial, then is dragged through the machinery of the justice system. We watch as Pilate's decision is influenced by the outcry of the crowd. This could be Te Whiti-o-Rongomai's story. It could be Martin Luther King Jr's story. It could be the story of so many who are abused by the institutions that are meant to protect them. They are sent through corrupt justice systems and punished by society before a verdict is even reached.

Much of the New Testament was written from prison cells rather than pulpits; from the pens of people abused, denigrated and reduced to mere inconveniences. The Lenten journey invites us to walk with Christ into the courtroom. Yet for some of us reading this prison cells may be unfamiliar places and we can

more easily relate to the crowd yelling 'Crucify him!'.

In our current cultural moment there is a reckoning. We are no longer content with systems of racism, sexism and homophobia existing. Something has to change. Yet, for Jesus, how that change happens matters. You can't have the person of Christ without the way of Christ. The medium is the message.

Some scholars have noted that Barabbas was likely a surname meaning 'son of Abus' (Bar Abus). In the earliest manuscripts of Matthew, Barabbas' name is written as Jesus Barabbas. Therefore, Pilate offers the crowd two choices. Pilate asks them, which Jesus do you want? What is your path to peace? The suffering servant or the violent insurrectionist? The crowd chooses Barabbas. They want the way of violence, the

JESUS IS GIVEN HIS CROSS AND SIMON HELPS HIM CARRY THE CROSS

— Luke 23:26-27 —

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him.



REFLECTIONS

While we know very little about Simon of Cyrene, three of the four gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark and Luke) specifically choose to refer to him by name. We do know three things. The first is that he is a foreigner who was travelling to Jerusalem on his way to or from somewhere. Second is that he was the father of two sons named Alexander and Rufus. Third, that he was forced to carry the cross for Jesus.

This third fact is particularly compelling. Simon of Cyrene did not choose to carry the cross for Jesus, rather he was forced by the soldiers who were crucifying Jesus. Simon was interrupted on his journey into the city and then forced to carry this heavy burden with Christ.

Anne Catherine Emmerich, a Christian mystic, described

her vision of this event which prompts our imagination. She said that Simon was very annoyed at being forced by the soldiers to walk with a person in such a bad condition. Jesus looked dirty and miserable. However, she said that as Jesus wept and looked at him, Simon felt his heart deeply touched by grace.

God often calls us to carry burdens with others where we do not expect it. Simon's journey was interrupted by Jesus' crucifixion. It wouldn't be surprising if he were annoyed. Some days, we are similarly interrupted and we are compelled to support others with their burdens. However, there is a profound beauty in Anne Emmerich's vision: that when Simon carried the cross with Jesus, his heart was transformed to one that was deeply touched by grace.

REFLECTIONS

Some scholars suggest that it is highly likely that his son Rufus is the same person referred to in the letters of Paul to the Romans. Perhaps then this was not just a single moment of interruption for Simon but a radical transformation of his heart and the hearts of his family.

This imaginative reading of this passage reminds us that when we

are called to carry heavy burdens with others, we become more and more deeply touched by the grace of Jesus. It invites us to see the face of Jesus and allow his grace to transform our hearts and those around us.

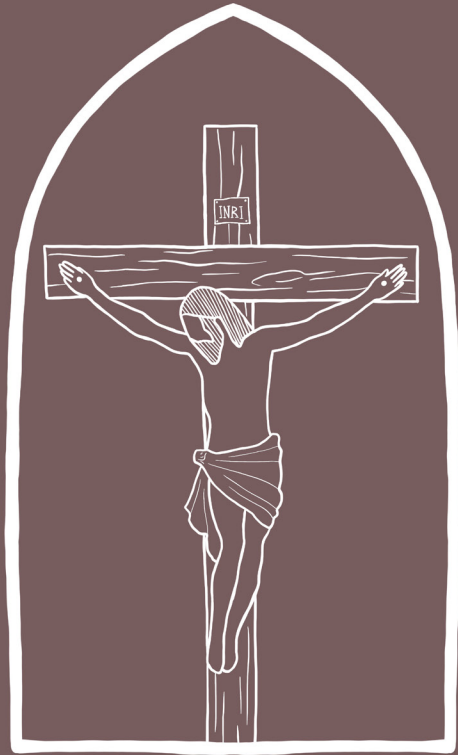
QUESTIONS

- 01 What stood out to you about this station describing Simon carrying the cross?
- 02 Do you have a story of feeling God's deep grace whilst carrying heavy burdens with others?
- 03 Spend a couple of minutes in silence / listening to God. How do you think the Holy Spirit might be leading you today?

JESUS IS CRUCIFIED AND DIES ON THE CROSS

— Luke 23:33-39 & 23:44-46 —

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.’ And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!’ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ There was also an inscription over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’



REFLECTIONS

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last.

If 'Let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!' This challenge appears three times here in different forms. For some present, it might have been a genuine question – until now it seemed like Jesus of Nazareth was a promising candidate, but if he is the Messiah, why has God's favour abandoned him now? What has gone wrong?

For others it might have been a justification for their lack of belief. If Jesus is the Messiah, then he would save himself from a humiliating death. He doesn't, therefore he cannot be God's chosen one. The scoffers hope to reassure themselves that he isn't the Messiah.

We do a similar thing when we pray the prayer, 'God, if you are real...' Prove it by doing this. Save this person. Heal this person.

We justify our unbelief in God because of the suffering we see in the world around us, or that we have experienced firsthand in our own lives. If God is real and loving, then we expect certain conditions to be met. When they are not, as far as we can see, God cannot be real either.

When we do this, we attempt to place constraints on God that he does not place on himself. We expect him to behave as we want him to.

This logic isn't watertight, for us or for the taunting crowds at Jesus' crucifixion. From the observation that Jesus does not save himself from execution, it is assumed that he is not the Messiah. That is one possibility, but it's not the only one. It could still be that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. God's chosen

JESUS IS TAKEN OFF THE CROSS AND LAID IN A TOMB

— Luke 23:50-56 —

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.



REFLECTIONS

All we know about Joseph is that he was a man of privilege and power. He held a position on the Sanhedrin council, which was a prestigious Jewish council that held religious, civil and criminal jurisdiction. In other words, he was in the ‘in-crowd’. He was also wealthy enough to own a private tomb, which would one day hold his body and those of his family. He had every reason to turn up his nose at the crucified Christ and return home with the rest of the crowds.

Yet we are told that he is ‘waiting for the kingdom to come’.

In the biblical narrative, Joseph’s actions alongside those of the faithful, unnamed women are some of the first testaments of the Kingdom of Jesus enacted by his followers after his death. As he waited for the kingdom, his actions reflected what Jesus

tells us the kingdom looks like – justice for the poor, liberty for those who are oppressed, and the uplifting of those who are marginalised. At this moment, Jesus is the poor, oppressed and marginalised.

In response, Joseph risks his belonging and reputation as a religious Jew within the Sanhedrin Council – the same group that voted to crucify Jesus. He risks his social status by asking Pilate if he can have the body of this alleged rebel to give a proper burial. Commonly, those crucified were left on the crosses, or in mass graves, to rot and be eaten by wild animals – the ultimate confirmation of their public shaming and degradation. In order to prevent this, Joseph chooses to sacrifice his private tomb, a symbol of inheritance, status and wealth for him and his family, to give the

REFLECTIONS

body of this rebel called Jesus a dignified burial.

Even in the moments after his death, the way of Jesus is leading people to lay down their power in order to live a way of radical inclusion and sacrifice to redeem the dignity of those that are on the margins.

QUESTIONS

- 01 What stood out to you about this station describing the burial of Jesus?
- 02 Where is God inviting you to lay down your privilege, position or power in order to uplift those who are poor, oppressed and marginalised?
- 03 Spend a couple of minutes in silence / listening to God. How do you think the Holy Spirit might be leading you today?

