

The Stations ofJustice

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Preface

Too often we rush to the foot of the cross during our Lenten reflections. To follow Jesus on the road to Calvary we must begin with the steps that led him down that path.

Through his actions of inclusive love Jesus challenged systems of oppression and lifted up the lowly. Faithfully living out the spirit of justice, he was met with misunderstanding, resentment, anger and persecution each step of the way.

*The Stations of Justice* seek to honor this journey, that our pilgrimage toward the cross may be filled with purpose and resolve. Let our prayers, rituals and lives challenge, liberate and restore as Jesus did, that we may truly be followers of the Way.

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THE FIRST STATION

Jesus proclaims God’s truth

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

*After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.* (Mark 1:14-15)

Meditation:

Jesus was preceded by a long line of prophets, each speaking out against the injustices of their time. Each had been given the insight to see reality from God’s perspective and was charged with an inner burning to speak God’s truth.

To be in right relationship with God involves more than piety and devotion. The covenant between me and God puts me in relationship with others as well. It is this relationship that grounds all that charity and justice and peace demand.

Most of those who reminded the people of their covenant responsibilities were met with rejection, persecution and death. Jesus knew where such a message would lead, and still he spoke; still he challenged; still he loved.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Prophet of Truth, this is the time of fulfillment. The charity, justice and peace of God’s reign is at hand, if we but join you on the side of justice. **Amen.**

THE SECOND STATION

Jesus risks contamination

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

*A leper came to Jesus [and kneeling down] begged him and said,
“If you wish you can make me clean.” Moved with pity he stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, “I do will it. Be made clean.”* (Mark 1:40-41)

Meditation:

“Unclean! Unclean!” By law they had to keep their distance and shout out their affliction, their disgrace. On one level the law was good––if the skin disorder was contagious others would be protected. But at what cost? A person cut off, excluded from the life of the community, unable to even approach God, at the very moment of their greatest need. Oh, they were not totally neglected; it was a blessing to give alms (thrown from a distance). But there is no sustenance without touch, no sense of blessing without the fellowship of others.

Jesus, knowing this man’s pain, reached out to him. Knowing that the law would deem him ritually unclean but also that no one is unclean in the eyes of God, he touched him. Knowing that it is God’s will that nothing stand in the way of relationship,
he healed him.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Transgressing Healer, convict us of God’s love for all persons, that we might reach out our hands to those deemed unclean and relegated to the margins of our society and our Church. As ministers of reconciliation, we join you on the side of love. **Amen.**

THE THIRD STATION

Jesus sides with life

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

*Again he entered the synagogue. There was a man there who had a withered hand. They watched him closely to see if he would cure him on the sabbath so that they might accuse him. He said to the man with the withered hand, “Come up here before us.” Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?” But they remained silent. Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart, he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately took council with the Herodians against him to put him to death.* (Mark 3:1-6)

Meditation:

Nothing grieved Jesus more than a lack of compassion. Nothing angered him more than the diminishment of life. He knew God to be life-giving and just. God’s laws could be no less. Jesus could be no less.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Faithful Advocate, when laws and conventions become ends in themselves, let us join you in your challenge, that our actions may never contradict your love. We join you on the side of compassion. **Amen.**

THE FOURTH STATION

Jesus confronts expectations

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

[Returning to Nazareth, the townsfolk asked,] *“Isn’t this the son of Joseph?” He said to them, “Surely you will quote me this proverb, ‘Physician, cure yourself,’ and say, ‘Do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.’” And he said, “Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place. Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down head-long. But he passed through the midst of them and went away.*  (Luke 4:22b-30)

Meditation:

Being favored is great! Acting as if favoritism is our right, or believing that others are less deserving, is not. Jesus challenged any notion that God plays favorites when dispensing grace. Nothing—not family ties, not the bonds of a common heritage, not even the unique revelation given to God’s Chosen Ones—nothing justifies our degrading the worth, potential or participation of another human being or of any group of people actively seeking truth, justice and wholeness.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Unbiased Caregiver, you remind us that no one has an exclusive claim on God’s mercy. Help us realize that all are “chosen,” that we’re not singled out for special favor but for a mission, a purpose: to join you on the side of mercy. **Amen.**

THE FIFTH STATION

Jesus welcomes all

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

*While he was at table in* [Matthew’s] *house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” He heard this and said, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.”* (Matthew 9:10-13)

Meditation:

Jesus scandalized many by the company he kept, but he knew that it was in the context of fellowship that healing and reconciliation could take place. All were welcomed at table with him––rich and poor, young and old, tax collectors and council elders, fishermen and scholars, women of virtue and those who had been forced to relinquish their virtue. The only condition was their hunger for relationship and their openness to conversion. Those who were self-righteous were too full of themselves to receive, too satisfied to recognize good news when they heard it.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Lover of us all, you proclaimed the good news of God’s inclusive mercy and unconditional love. Never let us judge the worthiness of another, nor exclude anyone from your fellowship and grace, as we join you on the side of reconciliation. **Amen.**

THE SIXTH STATION

Jesus liberates

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

*One day as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem, and the power of the Lord was with him for healing. And some men brought on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed; they were trying to bring him in and set [him] in his presence. But not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, “As for you, your sins are forgiven.”* (Luke 5:17-20)

Meditation:

Like the men who dismantled the roof to get their friend to him, Jesus broke through anything that would limit access to God. If personal sin stood in the way, he forgave and worked toward reconciliation. If it was a physical malady or a paralysis rooted in guilt or fear or unforgiveness, he healed it. If one’s idea of God was to narrow, he broadened it. If a corrupted law or religious structure countered God’s preferential option for life, he demanded its revision.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Reconciling Liberator, help us to dismantle the systems of oppression and structures of sin that would keep anyone from relationship with you. We join you on the side of liberation. **Amen.**

THE SEVENTH STATION

Jesus falls

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

*Then Jesus went from that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman of that district came and called out, “Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon.” But he did not say a word in answer to her. His disciples came and asked him, “Send her away, for she keeps calling out after us.” He said in reply, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” But the woman came and did him homage, saying, “Lord, help me.” He said in reply, “It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scrapes that fall from the table of their masters.” Then Jesus said to her in reply, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed from that hour.* (Matthew 15:21-28)

Meditation:

Jesus was a champion of justice in many ways, but in many ways he had internalized some of the presumptions and biases of his world. Jesus was human. Born into a people, a culture, a time and place––some things he never even thought to challenge. An uncritical reading of God’s unique covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could justify the exclusion and degradation of anyone who wasn’t a ritually pure, circumcised male.

Some of the conventions that Jesus inherited supported nationalism, war, racism, slavery, misogyny, and heterosexism. On this occasion he might have failed to reach out in answer to a desperate need, but a feisty woman challenged him, broadened his vision, and released his love.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Prophet of Truth, let not our immersion into yesterday’s traditions or today’s culture blind us to the diversity of your creation or the breadth of your love. We join you on the side of awareness. **Amen.**

THE EIGHTH STATION

Jesus causes division

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

[In explaining the cost of discipleship he said,] *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come not to bring peace but the sword. For I have come to set a man ‘against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s enemies will be those of his household.’”*  (Matthew 10:34-36)

Meditation:

Jesus was an instigator. What those in authority probably found most threatening was his power to stir consciences beyond the bounds of personal safety and security. He wielded a sword of moral discernment and conviction that severed any allegiance that would sacrifice justice for the sake of peace––and if such integrity could even threaten peace within a family system, could the stability of religious, cultural and political systems escape scrutiny?

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Convicting Truth, help us to see that our truest satisfaction and our deepest peace come from acting upon our convictions and joining you on the side of integrity. **Amen.**

THE NINTH STATION

Jesus challenges certitude

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

*Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They do not wash [their] hands when they eat a meal.” He said to them in reply. . . “Hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy about you when he said:
‘This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines human precepts.’”
He summoned the crowd and said to them, “Hear and understand.
It is not what enters one’s mouth that defiles that person; but what comes out of the mouth is what defiles one.”*  (Matthew 15:1-3a, 7-10)

Meditation:

The Pharisees and scribes believed that, by upholding the religious traditions of the past, they were preserving Judaism from defilement and error. Jesus challenged them, pointing out that in their zeal they had themselves fallen into error. The pit into which these blind guides had tripped was the false sense of security that comes from objectifying what we know about life or about God.

Rules and regulations maintain order and make us feel safe, but they are incapable of training the heart. By focusing on this internal barometer of moral discernment, Jesus threatened the control of the religious authorities and the certainty on which they placed their hope.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Critical Guide, human precepts are based on our limited insight into the mystery of your truth. Let us not to idolize them but use them as tools to train our hearts as we join you on the side of righteousness. **Amen.**

THE TENTH STATION

Jesus falls a second time

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

*Afterward he journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. Accompanying him were the Twelve and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, Suzanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources.* (Luke 8:1-3)

Meditation:

Jesus kept company with women. He spoke with them in public, ate at table with them, even dared to touch and be touched by them. Through his actions he challenged the religious and cultural attitudes of his day that treated women as non-persons. Yet no words are recorded that criticized this systemic oppression.

These were individuals who journeyed with him, ministered to his needs, and told others of his good news. These were valiant, passionate disciples, loyal even when the men fled in fear––yet none were counted among the Twelve, giving others a rationale for keeping them powerless for years/centuries/millennia to come. Could he have done more?

Still, his associations with these women were scandal enough to condemn him.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Friend of the Disenfranchised, we are only too ready to use the gifts and resources people have to share, yet in many cases we allow them to be denied the full benefits and responsibilities of their humanity, their citizenship, or their baptism. Help us to counter the judgments of the past and the prejudices of the present, as we join you on the side of inclusion. **Amen.**

THE ELEVENTH STATION

Jesus disrupts the status quo

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

[Jesus and his disciples] *came to Jerusalem, and on entering the temple area he began to drive out those selling and buying there. He over-turned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. He did not permit anyone to carry anything through the temple area. Then he taught them saying, “Is it not written: ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples’? But you have made it a den of thieves.”* (Mark 11:15-17)

Meditation:

Jesus symbolically brought down a whole system of use and abuse. He disrupted an economic system that exploited the devotion and piety of the poor, and sought to reform an unjust religious structure that limited access to the holy and segregated the people of God. Such stratification supported and justified inequality within the society at-large, and he challenged it.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Disruptive Challenger, overturn our hearts that we may never exploit another for our own comfort, security or gain, and draw our attention to the ways our institutions fail to support the dignity and equality of all your children, as we join you on the side of solidarity. **Amen.**

THE TWELFTH STATION

Jesus lifts burdens

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

*Then, within the hearing of all the people, Jesus said to [his] disciples, “Be on guard against the scribes. . . . They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers. They will receive a very severe condemnation.” When he looked up he saw some wealthy people putting their offerings into the treasury and he noticed a poor widow putting in two small coins. He said, “I tell you truly, this poor widow put in more than all the rest; for those others have all made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has offered her whole livelihood.* (Luke 20:45-46a, 47––21:4)

Meditation:

Jesus continually chastised the interpreters of the Law for placing impossible burdens on the people––this is the context of the widow’s mite. Praising an act of selfless giving was not his intent; rather, he saw her offering as an example of law gone wrong, and challenged the system that would demand such sacrifice from her.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Defender of the Poor, help us to continually reevaluate the laws and traditions of Church and society, so that our structures of governance and systems of support may never sustain dependence or burden the people they are meant to serve. We join you on the side of advocacy. **Amen.**

THE THIRTEENTH STATION

Jesus predicts his passion

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

*He began to teach* [his disciples] *that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”*  (Mark 8:31-33)

Meditation:

Suspecting that opposition will only resist to a point, an offensive team will continue its assault. When perpetrators of injustice suspect that their victims will go only so far in their protests, that advocates for the oppressed will eventually back down, they have every reason to push ahead with their crushing offense and have every reason to believe that they will win.

Jesus knew that once his purpose and resolve became public, there was no turning back. If his mission was to succeed, he had to be willing to pay the ultimate price. . . and make it known.

**Response: And the chief priests and scribes heard of it
and sought how they might put him to death.**

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, Relentless Defender, even when we know that our efforts will ultimately be justified, it’s hard to embrace the sacrificial giving that will liberate the oppressed. Strengthen our resolve, as we join you on the side of justice. **Amen.**

THE FOURTEENTH STATION

Jesus challenges those
who would follow him

Invocation: We praise you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**Response: Because by your challenge you have raised us up.**

*Then Jesus said to them, “This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed’; but after I have been raised up, I shall go before you to Galilee.” Peter said to him in reply, “Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine will never be.” Jesus said to him, “Amen, I say to you, this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” Peter said to him, “Even if I should have to die with you, I will not deny you.” And all the disciples spoke likewise.*  (Matthew 26:31-35)

Meditation:

They were first attracted to Jesus by the power of his words, affirmed through his actions on behalf of justice, reconciliation, mercy and love. Following him at his invitation, they came to understand all that such a call entails––the responsibilities, the risks, and the enduring promise.

We became his disciples at baptism, anointed to carry on his mission. Yet, how often we scatter, failing to stand up before the world to challenge injustice as he did. How often we deny him, failing to see his face in the face of the hungry, the naked, the captive, the oppressed. Let us repeatedly return to Galilee, where we first heard his call and learned of his saving deeds, that we may once more join him on the side of justice.

Let us pray:

Magnificat of Liberation

✠  **My life testifies to your goodness, O God,
and my spirit is lifted when I recount your saving deeds.**

**For you have looked on your servants in their suffering
and have transformed their affliction
into a blessing that endures.**

**Faithful to the covenant, you raise us;
true to your being and your renown, you save.**

 **In mercy you preserve a loving relationship
with all those who seek your truth.**

**You confound the proud in their conceit,
their plans made futile in the face of misfortune.**

**Not open to your grace, the powerful fall;
but the faith of the humble is affirmed.**

**The lowly know that by touching their hunger
the reality of their need is no longer obscured.**

**The self-sufficient, however, are left empty,
unaware of their deepest need.**

**Again and again you help those who know you,
who retell the stories of liberation and love.**

**Your promises made and fulfilled in the past
are confirmed by the commission given to us:**

**Faithful servants of your eternal covenant,
we go about the work of setting captives free.**

**All to your glory,
Source of all Being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**

May the God of justice and peace bless us and keep us,
✠ whole and holy, and bring us to everlasting life.
**Amen.**

Let us go forth, in the power of the Spirit,
that God’s faithfulness may be known
through our love and service.
**Thanks be to God.**