



Sense Making Faith p 23



What are the Stations of the Cross?

The 'Stations of the Cross', or the 'Way of the Cross' are placed in many churches to tell the story of Jesus' final hours and his journey to his death on the the Cross. Usually there are 14 'stations' or stopping points, which allow people to make a short journey or pilgrimage around the church, reflecting on the last hours of Jesus' life. Many people like to say prayers at each one. Each station usually contains a picture and a title. Many people like to pray at the stations of the cross during Holy Week, just before Easter, when the Church concentrates on remembering the events of Jesus' death and Resurrection.

In this journey, you can come with us through the stations. Each of the stations is explained, the scripture and tradition it refers to is examined and there is a meditation you can use if you want to.

The pictures are from a large, outdoor set of stations leading from the town up to the church in the French town of Rocamadour.



Station 1 Jesus is condemned to death



What's going on?

In this tableau, Jesus is on the left, facing Pilate, the Roman governor. It is Pilate's job to order whether Jesus should be condemned to death or be released. We see Pilate symbolically washing his hands in a basin of water, illustrating the gospel story (see below) that he did not want to order Jesus to death but was persuaded by the Jewish authorities. This is why the phrase 'to wash one's hands' of something, means to refuse to have anything to do with the matter in question.

What does the Bible say?

St Matthew's gospel 27.24-26:

So 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.

St Mark's gospel 15.9-14

He (Pilate) answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews? For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowds to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, was evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

St Luke's gospel 23.13-25

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people and said to them, "...he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him....Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, but they kept shouting "Crucify, crucify him!"...So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

St John's gospel 19.12-16

From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor." When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called the Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the Day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews "Here is your King!" They cried out "Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor". Then he handed them over to be crucified.

What does it all mean?

These accounts differ slightly, although the basic facts remain the same. All the gospel writers agree that Jesus was arrested and brought before Pontius Pilate who was the Roman governor of the area. The crime was to claim to be a king, specifically to be King of the Jews, and, as John's gospel points out, such a claim also challenged the authority of the Roman emperor. The gospels say that Pilate was unhappy about ordering the death sentence, preferring to commute punishment to flogging. However, other things were going on. The Jewish people and their leaders were unhappy and there was trouble brewing. It was also Passover, a tremendously important Jewish festival and there were many people in Jerusalem. Pilate had to look at Jesus' case, but he also had to try and stop trouble. The gospel writers suggest that the Jewish authorities who wanted Jesus out of the way, stirred up the people to insist that Pilate gave the death sentence, and use the tradition of releasing a Jewish prisoner to make the point stronger. Pilate offers the crowd Jesus, but they insist on his releasing another prisoner Barabbas instead.

Historically, the condemnation of Jesus in the gospel story led to persecution of the Jewish people, as being the people who put Jesus to death, and the cry "his blood be on us and on our children" has echoed down the ages as an excuse to hurt and vilify Jews. But if we look at this story properly, we can see that that kind of thinking is wrong. All kinds of things are going on here: there is political struggle, the occupying authorities and the occupied people, with all the tensions and difficulties that brings about; there is human jealousy and fear and the desire to retain power and control, but these all surround a course of events which Jesus himself predicted and was determined to pursue. Jesus put himself in the heart of Jerusalem at this place and time and does nothing to defend himself or to get away. These events, emotions and activities provide the context for what must happen, to show God's intention to the world.

Meditation

What is it like,
To be without friends,
To be alone, falsely accused,
To know you are going to die?

What is it like,
To see others go free,
To be condemned,
To know you are going to die?

What is it like,
Not to be chosen,
Not to be wanted,
To know you are going to die?

How many people have died
How many people will die,
Alone, friendless, condemned
Unwanted?

Station 2: Jesus receives his cross



What's going on?

Jesus is made to carry his own cross and must set off on the journey to the crucifixion site outside the city. To the right we see a man with a whip of knotted cords, to remind us that Pilate also ordered Jesus to be flogged. So Jesus would first have been beaten, leaving him weak and injured, before being made to carry his heavy cross. The man spreading a cloak reminds us that when Jesus first arrived in Jerusalem, the crowds cheered for him and welcomed him. Things are very different now.

What does the Bible say?

St Matthew's gospel 27. 27-31

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. ²⁸They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' ³⁰They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

St Mark's gospel 15.16-20

¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began saluting him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' ¹⁹ They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰ After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

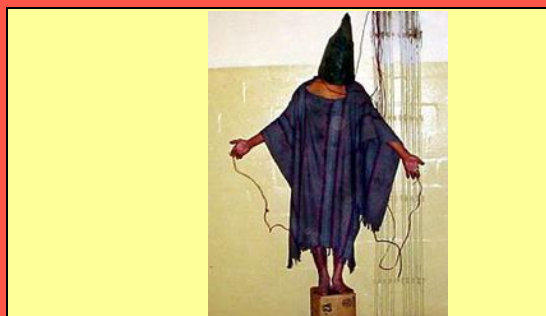
What does it all mean?

Matthew and Mark's gospel tell us that after Jesus was condemned to die and before he was sent out with his cross, he was taken away and humiliated. The soldiers took his clothes off, dressed him up as a king and then mocked him. They physically abused Jesus and spat on him. Jesus is now more than a prisoner, he is a victim whose human dignity has been taken away to be replaced by pain and humiliation. The Roman soldiers treat him as less than human. This description is also important for making links with a famous passage in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) where in the book of Isaiah, God's special servant is described as the man who is 'despised and rejected'.

Meditation

Around the world,
We have seen pictures of prisoners,
Tortured, humiliated, terrified,
Mistreated and mocked.

What happens to soldiers
Who hurt their prisoners?
What happens to their hearts?
What happens to their minds?



Station 3 Jesus falls for the first time



What's going on?

Jesus, weak from the flogging and after enduring torture, falls under the weight of the cross. Soldiers move forward to pull him to his feet.

What does the Bible say?

The gospel writers do not say anything about Jesus falling over.

What does it all mean?

The stations which show Jesus falling draw on part of the Christian tradition which reconstructs Jesus's final journey. There are three stations which include Jesus falling, and it reminds us that Jesus was physically weakened and hurt from the punishment already inflicted. He was not super-human, able to endure anything, but a human being who would have been suffering from shock, injury and blood loss after the beating and torture. The cross was a heavy wooden object and would have been an extraordinary burden even for an uninjured person. These stations remind us that the person we are following in this journey is a man who is already dying.

Meditation

**What does it mean to be weak?
To feel that you cannot go on?
What does it mean to no longer have strength,
To stop, to fail, to drop out, to give up?**

**What is it like to lose a race,
To be defeated, to come last?
What is it like to lose your health,
To know you'll never run a race again?**

**What does it take
To keep going, to struggle on,
To shoulder burdens, to keep faith?
What does it take to stay upon the road?**

Station 4 Jesus meets his mother



What's going on?

In this station, Jesus meets his mother Mary. He appears to pause, looking back towards her, but is being pulled onward and forced towards his death. His mother is devastated. There is one last moment of contact as they are pulled apart and she is left behind. She is completely helpless to stop what is happening. Tradition says that the other woman with Jesus' mother is Mary Magdalene.

What does the Bible say?

The gospels writers do not specifically mention this meeting between Mary and Jesus. It is part of Christian tradition.

St Matthew's gospel 27.55-56

55 Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. **56** Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

What does it all mean?

The purpose of this station is to remind us that Jesus was not some lonely hero going off to death; he was loved and cherished by his friends and family. Although the stations of the cross are focused on Jesus himself, we are asked to think about his mother and her feelings of horror and despair as her son is condemned, tortured and sent to his death. In the gospels, Mary is asked by God to bear Jesus and we learn of her willing obedience to do as God asks and her joy at bringing Jesus into the world. But the gospel writers also remind us that Mary is warned that her life cannot be all joy, 'a sword will pierce (her) heart'. Her love for her son will also mean that she will suffer the anguish any parent feels when their child dies.

Meditation

When I look on this child,
So new, so complete,
Can I bear the idea
That she will one day die?

Somewhere, some day,
With me, without me,
She will stop breathing,
Her heart will stop.
How can this love,
This world-breaking love,
That cherishes life
Admit her death?



Station 5 Simon of Cyrene carries Jesus' cross



What's going on?

Because Jesus is so weak and injured, a man in the crowd, called Simon of Cyrene, is pressed into helping carry the cross. In this station, we see Jesus, still wearing his crown of thorns (reminding us of the humiliation and torture), with his head bent as he struggles forward. In contrast, Simon, standing tall, young and strong, takes the weight of the cross.

What does the Bible say?

St Matthew 27.32

32 As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

St Mark 15.21

21 They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

St Luke 23.26

26 As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus.

What does it all mean?

These three gospel writers all say the same thing and agree on the identity of the man compelled by the Roman soldiers to carry the cross. This dramatic little picture gives us some important details, - Jesus is definitely in no condition to march to the place of his execution. The soldiers and guards are in a hurry and he is holding everything up. Clearly, Simon was no volunteer, but from now on he is intertwined with Jesus' final moments. It reminds us that this is not a story, but a historical event with many witnesses.

Meditation

What do we say
To the stranger who helps
When we fall, when we call,
When we find we are lost?

How do we thank
The person who cares
When we know at the last
We cannot help ourselves?

When do we step
Out of the shadows,
Holding out our hands
To help another?

Station 6 Veronica wipes Jesus' face



What's going on?

On the left, a woman moved by pity and sorrow comes out of the crowd and wipes the blood, sweat and dirt from Jesus' face. Simon, still supporting the cross, makes a warding gesture, perhaps to tell the woman to get out of the way before she gets into trouble for holding things up, or perhaps in an attempt to get people to give her some space. A soldier make a violent and active gesture in the background, but the foreground offers a moment of stillness and compassion.

What does the Bible say?

The Bible does not record this meeting between Jesus and the woman. It is part of Christian tradition.

What does it all mean?

The woman is named in tradition as Veronica, a name which means 'true icon' or 'true image'. This is because the story about this meeting says that when she wiped Jesus' face, the image of his face remained on the cloth. Throughout Christian history, stories have circulated about images of Jesus being transferred to fabric and remaining there as a witness to the extraordinary events of Jesus' last days. The most famous of these is perhaps the Turin shroud. Various versions of Veronica's napkin have been displayed in different churches in Christian history. But there is another element to this story, which has to do with how we come to see and know the face of Christ. Compassion and care for others reveals Christ in those we serve. In a situation where human injustice and evil drive an innocent person to their death, this station reminds us that human caring, pity and compassion can still break through.

Meditation

There is no place
Where love cannot go;
There is no time
When love cannot work.

Whom can we find
Lying in the road?
Whom can we find
Housebound at home?

Whom can we serve
Day by day?
Who is waiting for us
Along the way?

Station 7 Jesus falls for the second time



What's going on?

Despite the help he has received, Jesus falls again, this time harder and further. His collapse is surrounded by violent action, as the soldier turns with his whip and the horse presses forward. Those around him have to hold the cross as Jesus falls beneath it.

What does the Bible say?

The Bible does not mention this incident. It is part of Christian tradition.

What does it all mean?

As before, this part of the journey reminds us of Jesus' exhaustion and weakness after what has happened to him. The station is meant to remind us that Jesus' human body and human life was subject to the same suffering and limitations as any one of us.

Meditation

What it is like
To be so tired
You cannot go on,
You cannot continue?

What is it like
To be so hurt,
You cannot face
Another day?

What it is like
To know there is
No way but down,
No way out?

How many people
Across the world
Know what this feels like
Every day?

Station 8 Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem



What's going on?

Jesus pauses and speaks to the women in the crowd who have been watching. Simon continues to support the cross, while behind the Roman soldiers confer. In these last moments, Jesus takes one of his last opportunities to make people think about God.

What does the Bible say?

St Luke's gospel 23.27-31

²⁷A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. ²⁸But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." ³⁰Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us"; and to the hills, "Cover us." ³¹For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

What does it all mean?

The gospels tell us that even on his final journey, Jesus spoke to people and asked them to consider the larger picture than just what they were seeing at that moment. The women were crying for Jesus, who must have appeared pitiful, beaten and hopeless, but Jesus tries to get his message through again. His message was that people should look at their lives and turn back to God, otherwise life will be filled with misery, hopelessness and despair. He also urges them to consider the meaning of what is happening. The proverb about the green and dry wood means that if the inhumanity and injustice of society can condemn an innocent person to death, what will happen to everyone else, what hope is there?

Meditation

What's the big picture?
What does it mean
When we see those who suffer,
Who die without hope?

What can be done
To change the hurt world?
Who do we need
To bring justice and peace?

Station 9 Jesus falls for the third time



What's going on?

Jesus falls again and this time he cannot get up. We see him being dragged up again, but he appears entirely collapsed, perhaps unconscious. His head lolls and he seems incapable of resistance or of helping himself as he is pulled upwards. In the background the soldiers begin to put the cross in its final position.

What does the Bible say?

The Bible does not mention Jesus' collapse. The third and final time Jesus falls is part of Christian tradition about this journey.

What does it all mean?

This is the end of the journey and Jesus has nothing left. From this point on he has no control left over what happens to his body. Incapable of carrying his cross, he has staggered out of the city to the place of crucifixion, but now there is nothing left for him but death. Indeed, he is as good as dead already. This station reinforces the point that there could be no escape, no recovery and no means of avoiding the inevitable. Jesus will die and soon. There is no hope left for him. He has been abandoned.

Meditation

What is it like

To wait for death?

What is it like

To face that darkness?

Why do they torture

The already dead?

When is the suffering

Going to be enough?

Station 10 Jesus is stripped of his garments



What's going on?

Jesus, still wearing his crown of thorns, has his clothing removed. Before crucifixion, criminals were stripped naked and the clothing, if usable, sold or given away. Jesus was stripped for his flogging, but re clothed for the journey. Here we see Jesus being unclothed again for the final events of his torture and death. Hands are laid on him as the garments are pulled from his body. Yet Jesus offers no resistance, indeed his open hand suggests passivity and forgiveness as he submits to the humiliation.

What does the Bible say?

St Matthew's gospel. 35

³⁵And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots

St Mark's gospel 15.24

²⁴And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

St Luke's gospel 23.34

And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

St John's gospel 19.23-25

²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.'

²⁵And that is what the soldiers did.

What does it all mean?

The gospels do not mention the stripping, because it would be taken for granted that Jesus would have been stripped of his clothes. Of more significance to the gospel writers is what happened to the clothes afterwards. Jesus's clothes were divided up and the soldiers cast lots to see who would get them. This is important in the gospels because the act of casting lots appeared to confirm a prophetic statement that this was what would happen to God's servant. This then was put in by the writers as more proof that Jesus was really God's Son and that God had revealed what had to happen to him.

The station also requires us to consider something else: most images of Jesus leave him with a cloth for modesty's sake, but the crucified were stripped naked. They were going to die and so needed no clothing, every last possession was taken from them, in addition to the humiliation involved in being publicly displayed. When Jesus died, he had nothing left. His next journey was to the tomb.

Meditation

**Who are the naked?
The beautiful people,
The models, the beach beauties,
The body builders, the artists' models?**

**What would it mean
To stand naked before the world
To be utterly vulnerable
To be ashamed?**

**What would it mean
To see your clothes torn away
To be exposed to the gaze
Of people who hate?**

**What of the victims
Of rape, of torture
Of humiliation, of war,
The ones who need cover?**

**If we admire
The beauty of flesh, of form,
Must we not be reminded
Of those who would remain clothed?**

Station 11 Jesus is put on the cross



What's going on?

In this station, we see Jesus being nailed to the cross. The action is violent and terrifying. Behind, we are reminded that Jesus was not the only one crucified. A crucified man is already in place. He is tied, rather than nailed, this being an alternative method of attaching people to the cross. One of the soldiers is holding a ladder. Criminals were sometimes required to climb up to the cross. Jesus however, is too weak and exhausted and so is nailed to the cross before it is hauled up into position.

What does the Bible say?

St Luke's gospel 23.32-33

32 Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. **33** 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.

St John's gospel 19.17-18

he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. **18** There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

What does it all mean?

Crucifixion was an ancient method of execution and not uncommon. It was employed as a particularly painful, undignified and public means of bringing about death. Victims were left hanging until death, although death could be hastened by breaking the legs and causing swifter death either from asphyxiation or shock. The gospel writers tell us further that because of the Jewish festival of Passover, the authorities were requested for permission to break the legs of the victims and take the bodies away, but it was not necessary to do that in Jesus' case because he was already dead.

The crucifixion is the focal point of Christian understanding of Jesus's life on earth. His life and ministry were dedicated to telling people to enter into a right relationship with God, keeping God's commands and trying to build a world in which God's desires for peace, justice and right living would be evident everywhere. Despite this ministry of teaching, healing the sick and the mentally ill, releasing people trapped by guilt, poverty or the condemnation of others, Jesus was still arrested, himself condemned and put to death.

More than this, the crucifixion is more significant for the Christian belief that Jesus was not just a holy man, a religious teacher, prophet, shaman, or guru. Christian theology teaches that Jesus was God in human form and that instead of responding to his divinity, human beings put him to death. This shows that we are capable of not just ignoring God or turning away from God, but actually destroying God in our world.

Meditation

**What is it we fear
If not a long drawn out painful death.
Death from cancer, lingering death
The slow time of pointless suffering.**

**Would we even wish
Such a way of leaving this world
On our worst enemy,
Those who have hurt us most?**

**What is it we wish for those we love
And for ourselves?
How do we shut our eyes
To dreadful deaths?**

Station 12 Jesus dies on the cross



What's going on?

In this station Jesus dies on the cross. We see him, still crowned with thorns, hanging lifeless on the cross. At the foot of the cross, his mother has fainted with grief and is supported by one of the other women who have accompanied Jesus on his last journey. A disciple (traditionally St John) is present and similarly overcome with grief. The scene is one of despair. Jesus could not save himself; God did not come to save him from the cross. He is completely and utterly dead.

What does the Bible say?

St Matthew's gospel 27.45-50

45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. **46** And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' **47** When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' **48** At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. **49** But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' **50** Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

St Mark's gospel 15.33-41

33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. **34** At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' **35** When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.' **36** And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' **37** Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. **38** And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. **39** Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

40 There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. **41** These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

St Luke's gospel 23.44-49

44 It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, **45** while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. **46** Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last. **47** When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent.' **48** And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. **49** But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

St John's gospel 19.25-30

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

What does it all mean?

It is important to the gospel writers to make it clear that Jesus really did die and so they concentrate on his final moments. They all agree that Jesus spoke before he died, but the accounts differ, Matthew, following Mark, records that Jesus spoke of a feeling of utter abandonment and loss, complete separation from God the Father and an inability to make sense of what was happening to him. Luke has a more trusting and controlled version, in which Jesus gives over his personhood into the hands of the Father God as he dies. In John, Jesus performs a symbolic action out of the drinking from a sponge (typically offered to victims), again fulfilling an ancient prophecy before dying. In John, Jesus is aware of his mother and friends and makes provision for her as a last act of love before finishing his work on earth by giving himself over to death.

Another interesting aspect of the gospel accounts is the report of the Roman soldier who sees in Jesus's death evidence of his innocence and his divinity. As might be expected with such an extraordinary death, cataclysmic events are reported, a strange darkness, earthquake and the tearing of the Veil of the Temple, which separated the place where God was supposed to reside from the ordinary world.

We are asked to think clearly about what Christian theology understands to be the most extraordinary death in the history of the world. The gospel accounts make it clear that Jesus really died, he did not become unconscious or just appear dead. His spirit was 'given up' and his physical life ended. His family was not spared the grief of a loved one's death and Jesus was not spared the spiritual anguish of feeling that the Father God had abandoned him. At the same time, the gospels indicate that in dying Jesus was accomplishing a mission given by God to be carried out by Jesus as God in human form. This is why Jesus says 'it is finished' before dying.

This mission was to get rid of the separation between human beings and God because of human evil (sin). Theologians express this mission in different ways and have different interpretations of how and why it came about but the essentials of Christian understanding is this: because God is not evil, human beings cannot be with God if evil is present, but no human being can get through life without encountering or perpetrating some evil because our world simply isn't perfect. As both God and a human being,

Jesus died innocent of human sin, yet took on all that evil in his death. That is why he felt the pain of separation and abandonment from God. All Christians accept that 'Jesus died for our sins' however they interpret that statement, and that is why the universal symbol of Christian faith is a cross, not as a memory of a torture instrument but as a symbol of freedom, redemption, liberation and salvation

Meditation

**When life goes
What is left?
Where does the person
Who loved, smiled, reside?**

**What happens
When memory starts to fade
When the last possession
Is given away?**

**How can we know
If death is the end,
If there is no meeting,
No speech, no recognition?**

**Why do we hope
For another time
Another place
Where the dead are not dead?**

Station 13 Jesus is taken down from the cross



What's going on?

Jesus' dead body is recovered from the cross. Jesus' friends gather together to release him and take his body away to be buried.

What does the Bible say?

St Matthew's gospel 27.57-58

57 When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.

St Mark's gospel 15.42-45

42 When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, ⁴³Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. ⁴⁵When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.

St Luke's gospel 23.50-52

50 Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, ⁵¹had 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. ⁵²This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

St John's gospel 19.38

38 After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.

What does it all mean?

All the gospel writers agree on what happened after Jesus died. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish council, but also a follower of Jesus, having both status and authority, went and asked Pilate's permission to take the body away. Pilate ordered that Joseph could take custody of the body and so it was removed from the cross and preparations could begin for Jesus' burial.

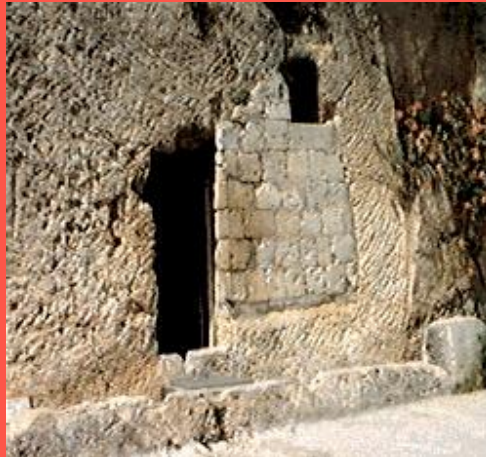
Meditation

**What is respect
For the dead?
It is a good funeral,
The right flowers,**

**The right words,
A good send off?
What would be the right
Way to honour these memories?**

**Is it now that we say goodbye?
When is the time to let go?
To label this box 'the past'
To say tomorrow we live differently?**

Station 14 Jesus is laid in the tomb



What's going on?

This is a photograph of the site known as the Garden tomb and popularly supposed to be the site where Jesus' body was laid.

What does the Bible say?

St Matthew's gospel 27.59-61

⁵⁹So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth ⁶⁰and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

St Mark's gospel 15.46-47

⁴⁶Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. ⁴⁷Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where the body was laid.

St Luke's gospel 23.53-56

⁵³Then 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. ⁵⁴It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments.

St John's gospel 19.39-42

³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took

the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

What does it all mean?

The gospel writers assure their audiences that Jesus' dead body was properly prepared for burial with embalming spices and properly wrapped and shrouded. A number of people were involved in, and witnessed the process and when Jesus was finally buried, the tomb entrance was sealed up with a large stone. It is important that people know that the body was properly disposed of because what will happen to this body is of the utmost importance.

Meditation

Now it is over
What is left?
What happens next?
How will we feel?

If we come back
To this graveside
Who is here?
Who will comfort us?

What would it take
Not to feel loss
Not to feel bereaved
To be comforted?

What would it be like
To come to this place
And to see this loved face
Smiling before us?

This concludes the journey through the stations of the cross, but it is not the end of the story. The purpose of this journey is a reflective preparation for an extraordinary event, which is the whole heart and purpose of the Christian faith.

What happened next?

St Luke's gospel 24.1-12

But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in, they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.' ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

What does it mean?

The way of the cross prepares us to share these emotions on Easter Day. The tomb containing the dead, broken body of Jesus is found to be empty. The stone is rolled away and there is nothing there. The friends of Jesus are filled with amazement and also fear, but are told that God has done what Jesus promised before to them and raised Jesus from death to life. Unsurprisingly, when this story is told, quite a few people refuse to believe it. Others have to see for themselves. Peter runs to the tomb and finds the cloths Jesus' body was wrapped in, - but no body. This experience is followed by the appearance of the resurrected Jesus to a number of different people and in different ways and leading to the certainty in Christian believers that God has made it possible through his Son Jesus, for every human being to have the same eternal life.

You may like to journey on other meditative versions of the Stations of the Cross. Here are some links to online versions:

<http://www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/stations.html>

<http://www.cptryon.org/prayer/child/stations>

<http://www.ewtn.com/devotionals/stations/face.htm>

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