

Christ Church Gabriola

A Collaborative Anglican – United Church
Open to All



Home Church
Good Friday, April 10, 2020
Way of the Cross
Self-Guided Meditation

As a powerful Easter tradition, *Stations of the Cross* or *Way of the Cross* is generally a reflection on fourteen images from the last day of Jesus' life. This Easter, Richard Bott, United Church of Canada moderator, offers a wider view of this ancient spiritual practice. By placing Jesus and his ministry beyond the boundaries of time and space, Bott reminds us of the universal truth and timelessness of Jesus' life and death.

First Station:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.
(Genesis 1.1-5)

The Way of the Cross starts with the beginning of everything. When Creation came into being, with a word and a bang, it must have been a remarkable event. On the grand scale of the universe, more than thirteen billion years of change occurred before we arrived. Human beings have existed for approximately 200,000 years with organized societies only for about 6000 years. God has been present in, around and with Creation. In this light, we might see the Way of the Cross as connecting with all places, all times.

Second Station:

"I am establishing my covenant between me and you, and with your descendants who come after you, generation after generation, as an eternal covenant, to be your God and your descendants' God after you"
(Genesis 17.2)

One of these early gatherings of people would become Israel. Through the Hebrew Scriptures, we can explore the ways our spiritual ancestors understood their relationships with God. Stories of enslavement and freedom; of infertility and childbirth; of sibling rivalry and empire building; of covenants made, broken and reformed – these too are the Way of the Cross.

Third Station:

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. Today in the town of

David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

(Luke 2:7-11)

Then Jesus is born, a child of Israel during occupation by the Roman Empire. Divine messengers proclaim he is special. He is called “One who is saves,” “God with us” and “Son of God” – names that are both religiously and politically charged. He is a refugee, seeking safety from genocide. While we don’t know much about his childhood, one story in scripture finds him teaching the elders in the temple. The Way of the Cross continues in the birth, and the life, of this child.

Fourth Station:

And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased. Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

(Matthew 3:16-17)

Jesus’ ministry begins with his baptism in the Jordan River. As John lifts him out of the water, Jesus has a vision of the Holy Spirit. In the very next breath, the Spirit takes Jesus into the desert. Here, in solitude, he fasts and prays, and finds himself tested. He is invited to turn stone to bread and to test God’s call by jumping from a high place, but he declines. He is offered the entire world if he would worship the Tempter, but he declines again. At this point, he returns to the community and begins his ministry. The Way of the Cross is in Jesus’ choice to live with integrity in his relationship with God.

When Jesus was being tempted in the wilderness, he ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, “One does not live by bread alone. Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, “To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours. Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying

to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

(Matthew 4:1-12)

Fifth Station:

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.” Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.” The woman said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment. “Woman, great is your faith!

(Matthew 15:21-28)

Jesus is a healer. There are stories throughout the gospels of him curing skin diseases, paralysis, blindness and even death. Sometimes the healings challenge religious and societal rules. In this instance, a non-Israelite woman asks Jesus to heal her daughter, but he says he is only there for the children of Israel. She challenges him to see his calling in much larger terms. He learns and is changed. The Way of the Cross is not only about death and dying, but about growth and healing, too.

Sixth Station:

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the king of Israel!” Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written: “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion, see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt”.

(John 12.13-14)

And now we come to Holy Week. Even knowing that the authorities have been searching for ways to quiet him, Jesus chooses to return to Jerusalem, the heart of those authorities’ power. He enters as people preparing for Passover, a celebration to remember God freeing the people of Israel from slavery. Although he enters humbly, people see him as one who will lead them out of oppression. The Way of the Cross is also about people’s expectations of God – both realistic, and not.

Seventh Station:

Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me". (John 2:15-17)

Jesus enters the temple and finds commerce taking place. People are there to purchase animals for sacrifice, then understood as a way of repairing one's relationship with God. An entire system had grown around this process, which became a barrier to worship. Jesus is so overcome by what he sees that he throws the tables over and the people out. The Way of the Cross is about challenging unjust systems, especially those that are obstacles between people and God.

Eighth Station:

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood". (Luke 22:14-20)

Jesus' last meal is the commemoration of Passover. He blesses the bread and wine, and tells his disciples that each time they share it, they are to remember him. He reminds them to love one another, and tells them that they will never be alone. Afterwards, Jesus takes them to a quiet place, where he asks them to pray. The Way of the Cross is about hope, love and prayer in the face of oppression and possible death.

Ninth Station:

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches

and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?". (John 18:1-11)

In the garden, Judas hands Jesus over to the authorities, Jesus is arrested and questioned. He is stripped, humiliated and tortured, forced to carry the instrument of his death to where he will be killed. Many of his disciples, fearing for their lives, disavow him and run away. Many, but not all. A group of women remain close, to stay with Jesus in his death. The Way of the Cross is place where power works to kill and destroy.

Tenth Station:

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 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." One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise". (Luke 23:32-34, 39-43)

Historic records tell of rows of crosses, each with someone who offended Roman law in some way. This is death of terror and torture, a public death meant to humiliate and dissuade. The gospels tell of Jesus' willingness to forgive his killers and to love those dying with him. They also tell of his fear that he has been abandoned by God. The Way of the Cross is a place where God's love meets the worst of humanity's fear and hatred.

Eleventh Station:

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. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things. (Luke 23:44-49)

Although people would often endure for days when they were executed by crucifixion, Jesus did not. Before the sun goes down, Jesus gives his spirit into the Creator's hands. The Way of the Cross is about death.

Twelfth Station:

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. (Luke 23:50-55)

Jesus' body is placed in a tomb given as a gift from one of his disciples, Joseph from Arimathea. The body is wrapped according to the customs of his people, and sealed away until it can be properly prepared after the Sabbath. Jesus is dead, his family and friends are grieving, and the movement that had grown up around him and his teachings is in disarray. The Way of the Cross is about grief and loss.

Thirteenth Station:

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying

there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes. (John 20:1-10)

The Way of the Cross is also the Way of Resurrection of Christ, and Christ's love, alive in the world forever. It's about surprise and hope in ways that are unexpected, perhaps even impossible. Jesus appears before Mary and tells her to let the other disciplines know what she has seen. They meet the risen Christ, who calls Peter to "feed my sheep." The disciples go into the world to share what Jesus has given them. The Way of the Cross is about abundant life for all of Creation.

Jesus said to Peter the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter felt bad because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love Me?" He answered Jesus, "Lord, You know everything. You know I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep." (John 21.17)

Fourteenth Station:

Here and now.

As I see it, the Way of the Cross doesn't stop with Jesus. This final station might find us looking at a crowd of people from all over the world, or it might be a mirror. Here we reflect on the words of another of Jesus' disciples, Teresa of Avila, who said "Christ has no body now but yours... Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the worlds."

The Way of the Cross is the Way of Easter.
Not just a moment in time,
it reaches right back to the beginning,
is now, and continues
to whatever end there might be.

Mission Statement

We follow Jesus Christ
Worshipping and Serving with Love and Joy
We open our minds, hearts, and doors to the world.

October 2016