

Invitation to a Cross



THE 14 STATIONS OF THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS CHRIST

Everyone of us is a risk for God. He takes a chance creating each of us hoping that we will love Him in return; hoping that we will not turn away from Him, but walk with Him; and as often as we need to, run into His Loving arms. Yet so few of us do, myself included, and the risk for God is a broken Heart.

God loves us so much that Hell exists. The gift of freewill that we are given is such an act of Love and Trust by our Creator that nothing in the universe can compare to its special uniqueness. He loves us so much that we have been given the ability to choose to return love to Him or keep it to ourselves. Returning love to this Father brings us closer to Him and the destination is Heaven. Not returning it, but keeping it for ourselves, separates us from this wonderful Lover and our destination is Hell. Hell exists because He gave us the freewill to choose Love.

Such is the stage of the Agony of our Lord in the garden. When Christ held each one of us in His Heart one at a time and gazed on us with Love only to have so many of us reject Him and turn away. Such is the Agony that causes God to suffer so much pain that He bled even before He was beaten by us. Such is love. Such is the risk that God took when He made you; when He makes each one of us. The answer to the age old question of why do we exist is found by answer the question... Do you choose to suffer God's Heart or bring Him comfort? Because as much as we have the ability to inflict wounds in His Heart by sinning, so also the love we give to Him in return strengthens His Resolve to endure His suffering and be Crucified for the Redemption of our Sin.

Though accuracy to the Gospel was the foundation in the composing of these Stations, this prayer is not meant to be received as a historical account, but as a means of devotion to grow closer to the Creator who lovingly risked making each one of us. It is certainly worth spending time considering the minute literary details regarding the many characters who were present during the Crucifixion, but more profound an experience is discovered by dwelling on the aspects of our own life that parallel the many different human responses of that Day. Every one of us has our own perspective to view God. And regardless of where we choose to stand, His Hand is always reaching out inviting us to join Him.

The First Station

Jesus is condemned to death

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH BARABUS

Free? They've chosen to release me? How is that possible?! They surely haven't forgotten all the things I have done? But because of some man the people hate, I've been set free? Ha! What luck! I don't understand, but I will willingly escape death quickly before they change their minds. Now I see the other man. The one chosen to be executed in my place. He stands near Pilate. He is beaten and bloody. Through his matted, sweaty hair, I see his eyes gazing at me as the soldiers lead me away. His expression is not what I expect. His eyes offer no anger or jealousy to me. They are gentle. He almost seems to be... pleased for me. It causes me to pause, and my attention is quickly drawn to Pilate. His eyes. They are of disbelief. He seems conflicted... confused. This is a strange scene. Listen to Pilate bargain with the crowd. He pleads the Jew's innocence. He's trying to get the man released. I truly fear Pilate will change the crowd's mind, and then I'll be sent back. But he doesn't. Instead, he gives into the their demand. Afraid for his own life. *Huh...* Coward. But I don't blame him. The crowd has become a mob. And I'm grateful. Grateful for the crowd, grateful for the Coward, and oddly grateful for the poor wretch. He looks like a pathetic weakling, but there's something more that I cannot identify. They drag him off to be scourged. I want to flee and get as far away as I can, but feel attracted to see the results of this compelling event... from a good distance, mind you. The man, Jesus, is returned to Pilate. He is a bloody mess. What is that on his head? Some kind of crown? Never seen that before. They take him away, and give him a cross to carry. He accepts it in the most peculiar way. Somehow he makes it to Golgotha. On either side of him, a criminal hangs. I know them both. I've been with them. I know their crimes. Like my own. Crucifixion of fellow criminals has never bothered me before. They each got what they had coming. They should have been more cunning like me. But something is different in me this time. I know that one of these three men should be me, the one in the middle, but in my place hangs this innocent man who somehow managed to carry a cross here without dying. I watch as one criminal attacks the man with the crown, while the other defends him. Could I ever let myself be like the second? Defend an innocent man? Where once I saw weakness in the him, suddenly I see strength. I stare at the ugly sight and for the first time I see it. I see that *I* am the ugly sight. Jesus speaks meaningful words of wonder to the criminal who defended him. They are words I want to understand, but am too afraid to pursue. *My* strength now seems weak. I am like Pilate; conflicted, confused, a coward. I am like the criminal who attacks innocence even at the end, only to have his eyes gouged out by a crow because of my blindness. It's hard to watch for my heart actually desires to be the other. Could I ever allow myself... to be good? Could a wretch like me ever be changed?

The Second Station

Jesus takes up His Cross

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH PONTIUS PILATE

I am a man of power. I am always sure of myself. I am in control of all the people of this land. And I... am lost. This man, Jesus, the one they call the King of the Jews, the one they praised less than a week ago as he entered the city, the one I was concerned about leading a revolution, stands before me, and accepts crucifixion. As if it were... his plan. The things they accuse him of are not punishable by death in my eyes, but this crowd terrifies me. Even all my best soldiers on hand would not be enough to contain the madness this mob is exuding, and he does not resist or try to defend himself. If only he would resist the accusations, I might have cause for immediate execution because of retaliation, or alternatively, call for a postponement to simply ease the tension, but he offers me nothing to justify either course. I have already tried sending him to Herod, but that petty scoundrel has weaseled his way out again! I do not want this man's blood on my conscience, but I do not want MY blood on Caesar's hands either. My wife's dream has come true. Her dreams are few, but they are often telling dreams. I feared as much with this one too when she told me. And here it is. I, with no answers, but only riddles. I believe he is *their* king. The King of the Jews. But what do I do? He is not my king and I do not dare show my subjects or these Jews that I am angry and afraid. Oh, what god of the pantheon will help me with this decision? I have many, and these Jews have but One God. Could this truly be the Son of their God? Not merely just their King? I feel a stirring. As though... *No!* I want only to wash my hands if this! If he *is* their King as I think he is, let *their* God deal with him as he wishes. If this Just one be the Son of God, then his God will defend him and deliver him from their hands. He *is* their King after all, and I inscribe it for all to see because there is no doubt in me of it any more. I see it, whether they do or not. They protest. But what I have written... is truth. Truth... What is Truth? I asked him this question. And for a response, he said nothing but embraced his cross... Not in fear but with purpose. I saw it in his eyes. I have seen that look before from men in battle. When one gives his life to save his fellow comrades. I begin to see clearer what I could not see when I met him. Truth. Truth made clear in Sacrifice. Could this man be more than the King of the Jews? Could he Truly be the King... of all? God. If so, what have I done? It is too late to stop. I stand in my palace powerless as he climbs the hill, a great burden on his back. I am compelled. Dare I listen to my heart? My wife? Dare I lose all that I possess here and now for the sake of the Truth that stirs within my soul? Or do I stay as I am?

The Third Station

Jesus falls the first time

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH MARY MAGDELENE

All the sins of man have made themselves known in this place. I recognize them all too well. In sin I lived before He came and rescued me. I was wounded, injured by my sins and the sins of Man. Pride, Envy, Avarice, Wrath, Gluttony, Lust, Sloth. And they have all shown their hideous faces here today, bound together and seeking to break my Lord under their weight. I watch Him stumble and fall to the earth... onto his knees. From nearby, I stumble too. Exhausted with Him... for Him. I begin to give into all my fears and doubts. This, I have not done since I met Him. The memories of my former life come alive within me. A nightmare in broad daylight. This is undeniably far worse for Him than it was for me, but we have been here before, together. Only our roles have reversed, and I am helpless to save Him as He did me. I see what He is experiencing, and the pain is like my own. Far worse for Him since He is not guilty of these sins. For me, the weight of sin had used me. Abused me. Tortured and haunted me. Drug me through the streets like an animal to slaughter. Exposed shamefully before everyone. To be judged as a sinner for I *was* a sinner. But waiting for me was this man. A stranger, a teacher, a savior. He wrote with his finger in the dirt, and was silent for several moments as if looking for His response in the dust. On that day, my life was saved by His mercy, and the words He spoke to my executioners. I have followed Him and served Him ever since. He is my God, and I love Him. I cannot breathe without Him. How can any of us go on if He dies? I grasp the fleeting, joyful memory of how my most wonderful day came to a conclusion as I watch the horror before me. I cling desperately to hope and feel it slipping away. This day *must* end for Him the way it did for me that day. With Mercy! *It must!* Dear God, this day is so strongly familiar to me, but I do not see how this can end with the same Mercy! I only yet see the sin exposing Him and pressing Him down. Down in the dust. Where is Mercy? Why must He suffer this way? How can Mercy redeem this?

The Fourth Station

Jesus meets His Mother

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH JOHN THE APOSTLE

What is happening? I do not understand. A week ago they celebrated His arrival and now *this!* My Lord lay beaten and humiliated. Face down, a beam across His back as His blood stains the gravel red. I remember when we learned that Lazarus was dying and Jesus was going to him. Thomas declared we would be with Him, though it would likely mean being stoned in Judea with Jesus. We were all willing to die with Him that day. We felt proud to be in such a battle. The Boanerges. That is what He called my brother and I. Sons of Thunder. But this is different. We were not ready for this. This is... I can't even explain what *this* is! This is not how we thought things would be. So much has happened so quickly, and we have all dispersed. Scattered... like vermin. It has exposed who we disciples really are. Were we ever truly walking *with* Jesus? I do not know where my companions have gone. Are they hiding in fear? Watching from a distance? I do not know. I only know that I stay close to Mary, His Mother. In all this chaos, I cannot let her be trampled... or worse. What if they take her as well? She is staying as dangerously close to Jesus as she can be. I stay close to her to protect her. Yet she... she walks as if she carries the weight of a cross, too. This tragedy has pierced her and penetrated her heart. How does she keep moving forward? I am scared to death. How does she seem to have so much peace during such an event as this? In the years that follow, I reflect on how prideful I was until this day. The day I finally began to let go of who I thought I was, and started choosing to become who God made me to Be. By His Grace, I was given this humble woman and I took her into my home. Into my heart. This Woman. This Mother. She is the gift He offered this disciple whom He loves as He gave His life on this cross, and this servant finally began to understand with a humbled heart. He began to see that we don't define ourselves. We are already designed and chosen for something great, whether big or small. And every part is needed. As strong as I thought that I was, I now know I would not be at His feet if it were not for this woman being here. I would have scattered like the others. And now I realize it was not I who got His Mother to the cross safely. It was She who brought me to Him, a disciple whom He loves, and there are so many disciples whom Jesus Loves. I am not the only one. I will write about this one day, but how many other followers of Christ will understand that in becoming a disciple, you are also one whom He loves. How many will misunderstand this for as long as this disciple has? Every disciple will be called to the foot of this Cross; it is the only Way to Salvation; and *every* one will be offered this same unexpected, unexplainable gift. I wonder how many will be humbled enough to accept Her help to get to Him? And how many will try to walk this path with their own strength alone?

The Fifth Station

Simon helps Jesus carry the cross

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH SIMON OF CYRENE

I am not from here. My family and I have traveled far to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast as we always have. As we traveled, we heard many things about the man from Nazareth. Since arriving, we watched cautiously from a guarded distance. We heard the man talk and saw amazing things. My wife believes he is the Messiah. I want to believe, but am unsure. I have seen others make claims before, so I am on my guard, but no one has ever been so real as him. And now, he is part of a Roman parade of criminals with a cross upon his back as he is led to his crucifixion. He is beaten and scourged. He struggles to carry the weight. He will never survive to the top of their hill. Can this really be the Son of God? If he is the Messiah sent from God, why does he not have the strength to lift this cross? Why would he not just make it go away? I want to believe that the Messiah has come, but this doesn't seem how a Messiah would be. I am cautious... but I am also curious. I witnessed amazing miracle from this man, and I step closer in hopes of seeing a miracle again. I draw nearer and my gaze is captured by the eyes of Jesus. He sees me as if seeing into my soul. Before I know what is happening, I lose track of my wife and children in a rush of onlookers and find myself under the weight of the man's cross pressed into service by a centurion. It all happens so quickly. I help Jesus carry the cross the rest of the way to the site of his crucifixion, and I am baffled at the journey I take with him, or rather... he takes with me. For while I walk with Jesus next to me, expecting to bear all of the weight from the heavy cross, I find that the burden, though heavy, is easier to bear than I anticipate. I am now close enough to feel the heat coming from Jesus' body. It is like a furnace. I feel as if I am in a fiery pit being purged by an invisible fire. His eyes meet mine a second time and they embrace. I feel understanding descend upon me like a shower of cool water and begin to see a glimpse of the Divine. This cross is heavy, but He did not need me to help him. He wanted me to. Despite the suffering this Man was undergoing, he reached out to help me... carry my cross. The cross of doubt. He slowed down in His suffering to heal my heart by allowing me to be with Him, and walk with Him in my fears. My presence and acceptance of His help was all the help He wanted from me. Through His vulnerability with me, my trust in Jesus begins to blossom, and my doubt is replaced with belief.

The Sixth Station

Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH VERONICA

Every morning I stand in the doorway of my home, and remember the day I saw my Savior pass before me carrying the cross. The crowds flooded the street that day to witness the day's execution. There is never any enjoyment for me to see the public display, even for the worst of criminals, but that day my soul plummeted when I saw through a break in the crowd one of the three victims. It was my Jesus. I still remember His face. The face of our Divine God covered in blood... I drop whatever it was that I was washing with my sudarium cloth, but do not even recall hearing it shatter when it hit the ground. My knees buckle, and I almost collapse. As I take in the scene and start to comprehend the horrible sight before me, I desperately yearn to relieve Jesus' suffering. It burns like a blaze in my heart. My body trembles. I have no other considerations, but to console Him. The sudarium is still hanging in my hand. I drench it with water, and run to Him unfettered. I no longer see the crowd. Everything but Jesus is a blur to me, and the people do not seem to notice me either. I am small and insignificant so my approach goes undetected by the soldiers whose focus must be elsewhere on the overwhelming crowds. But I am aware that I have just entered the lions den of Babylon. The white hot flames of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace surround me, yet the angels are with me keeping me safe. I was beckoned to this by the Father. It is His will, and not my own. I know this because I am terrified, yet I have peace, not fear. My heart is comforted. Grace is always there for us ready to be given when we ask for it and cooperate with His will. And Grace always wins. Like light in darkness, it always shines. I obeyed and His Grace was poured upon me. He made me for this, and I trust in Him. I place the cool, damp cloth against His face as gently as I can to remove the heat and blood and agony. I dare not wipe for I do not want to cause Him more pain, but my hands tremble so feverishly. I wish I could do so much more, but this is enough. It is all He wanted of me in that moment. Nothing more. Nothing less. The smallest acts mean the most to Him. His will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

The Seventh Station

Jesus falls a second time

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH A SON OF SIMON

Where is he? Where is our father? Somewhere in the thickest part of the crowd. There! He is carrying a cross with that man. Gripping my little brother's hand, I follow closely behind mother as we make our way through the people. Mother holds my baby sister. I hear the panic in their cries to father. Where is he? I keep losing sight of him. I have to keep wiping my tears, and I can't see where we're going. Why did they grab him?! My brother asks if father is going to be crucified. I tell him "Of course not! He doesn't have his own cross, stupid!" I call him a mean name, because I am scared and I don't actually know if I'm right. Maybe father *is* going to die. I'm so scared for Abba and I take it out on my little brother. I feel bad, but then my attention gets drawn to the man father is carrying the cross with. He's the one we saw yesterday morning talking to the people and healing the sick. Mother likes him. I do, too. He let me hold his hand yesterday. It was strong, but gentle. Father says he doesn't know about him yet. I'm not sure what that means, but both of my parents were very upset when they realized it was him carrying a cross. I couldn't tell who he was at first. He was so beaten and bloody. More like an animal being prepared during a sacrifice, than a person. I only learned who it was when father told mother a few moments before the soldier grabbed him. Why are they executing him? He's a good man! What did he do wrong?! Is Father going to be killed, too?! They pause for a moment as the crowd gets restless. The soldiers push back the crowd and a young woman steps out to wipe the man's face. The soldiers don't see her, but I'm small like her, so I do. They move forward again, father carries the heavy cross with the other man. What was his name? *Jesus!* That's right. And as I say his name, he falls. Jesus falls. He *isn't* a bad man! Why do they hurt him like this?! Father holds the weight of the cross by himself. I know Abba is strong. I have seen him pull stubborn oxen against their will. But that cross seems to crush him. I see him watching Jesus. Straining as he waits for him to get up. And then Father's eyes find Mother and me, and my brother and sister. I watch the expression in his face change. The signs of fear and exhaustion leave. He reaches out his hand, and helps Jesus to his feet. Years later, when I am a man myself, I talk to father about what happened in that moment. He tells me that when he saw his family standing there, understanding came to him in a shower of grace, and he knew who Jesus was dying for. He couldn't explain how, but in that fleeting moment he understood that Jesus' death was an act of Love for His Family, the Children of God, and my father knew, that for him, that moment was his opportunity to show his own family what love looks like.

The Eighth Station

Jesus meets the weeping women

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH THE WIFE OF SIMON

I grasp my children and bring them closer to me as they watch their father help Jesus carry the cross. Terror is on every side denouncing Jesus as the Son of God. All those who claimed to be His friends, now seem to watch for Him to misstep and fall. I am joined by friends I met this week. Women of Galilee and Samaria. United followers of Jesus. We reach out to each other clinging to support one another as we weep together at the tragedy before us. We know Jesus is the Messiah, our Savior, and He is being tortured before our very eyes. For what reason? We try to guard our children from the horror, but we are in too great a shock to be of any effect. We tremble and shake. We mourn and cry out for Jesus in His agony. He sees us and pauses turning His face to us. He does not seek comfort or pity. Instead, He speaks to us with direct words that draw us even closer to Him; to share in the burden of the cross with Him. He takes this moment with us. And despite His suffering, His concern is not for Himself, but for us. He tells us *not to weep for Him, but for ourselves, for our children, and for generations of children to come*. What tragedies are to come that could be worse for us than this?! He tells us *a day will be when people consider it a blessing for women to be barren?* What does this mean? Could life become so horrible one day that we desire not to have children because they will suffer worse things than this? Could there be a time when women are glorified for not choosing motherhood? Or worse, a world where women even celebrate the rejection of the life in their wombs? I cannot imagine the kind of world He speaks of. He says the people of that time *will desire to be destroyed under the weight of the earth*. What do these words mean? I do not know, but one day in reflection of this moment, I do see one thing clearly. To be a Believer, as a disciple of Christ, we each must accept our own cross, however horrible the world we live in may be, or we will be crushed by the weight of this world. We are all given a cross to pick up and follow this Way just as He told us. This Crucifixion; it was given, not only for our Redemption from Sin and Death, but as *the Example* to follow in our own lives. The Way of Truth is not easy. But if Jesus be someone you love, would you not die for Him, as well? Just before Jesus paused and told us these final mysterious words, I had watched Him fall to the ground, and saw the fear in my husband who was with Him. Simon could have chosen in that moment to abandon Jesus and the cross He bore, but he told me afterwards that it was my presence that encouraged him, and gave him the strength he needed to choose his own cross of the moment to help Jesus to His feet because he saw that Jesus was in me as well. He says we did it together. My husband was the Simon who helped Jesus carry His cross, and I was the Simon with Jesus, who helped Simon carry his. We all need Jesus, but with each other. Not alone. That is the way He made us, and it is a Way that means sacrifice and communion. We can either choose to reject His Way and be crushed under the means of this world individually, or we can accept the cross that the Father gives each of us to carry with His help and support from each other as Adam and Eve were meant to be from the Beginning.

The Ninth Station

Jesus falls the third time

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH THE CENTURION

How is this possible that a mortal man can undergo so much torture? I tell you, it is not. How do my brother centurions not notice what's happening? I didn't see at first, but now we have watched this man fall for the third time, and he continues to rise as if from the dead. It's not merely because of the help of the man we pressed into service. He's actively doing it himself. I know, as a soldier. I have been witness to many such crucifixions. Rome has perfected the art of this kind of execution, but this one has been different. We know how to scourge a man to the point that he will still be able to get up the hill to Calvary. The path is barely a little more than half a kilometer, but we don't want to carry a victim for any part of it. They have to walk it themselves. The anguish of feeling like they're digging their own grave is all a part of the torture. But this man came to us already beaten and bloody, and practically exhausted from no sleep and his rigorous Passover rituals. And besides, Pilate had him scourged a little extra expecting the crowd would settle for him to be released if he was almost beaten to death. I don't think Pontius was thinking they would still demand crucifixion. The other centurions must be so caught up in the moment that they just don't see what is becoming so blatantly clear to me. This man... should already be *dead*. Or at least debilitated and unable to keep moving forward. But despite how his body shakes, he's getting back up again and pressing on. I started to notice something was unusual after I saw him fall the first time. Not by the fact that he got to his feet again, or even the effort it took him. That was fairly normal... since we whip them until they do it. What was not normal was how he seemed to do it with such intent and purpose regardless of our brutal encouragement. And this from a man who doesn't actually deserve his execution. But the most troubling thing is this crown. This crown of thorns is not normal. It was put on his head after the scourging. A scourging that does not consider additional head trauma to follow. With every fall, the pressure to get to his feet forces even more blood to rush from his head. Head wounds bleed so much more profusely than the rest of the body, and this is now his third fall! I have never seen so much blood except in warfare. Where does his strength come from? Can the sheer will and intent to get back up be enough for a man to continue living? I don't think so. At some point there isn't enough blood inside for the will to mean anything. What kind of supernatural purpose could this man have that is so great? When will his blood run out? He should already be dead! Yet with a hundred meters to go, he overcomes it. How is this possible? I *tell* you it is not. I have seen stronger men than this struggle with far less injuries. What this man has accomplished... is not of this world. It is beyond it. It is Other worldly. And when the time comes for me to be handed a spear to pierce the side of this man and confirm his death, I hesitate... but not for fear of thinking he might still be alive, for I already watched him breathe his last. No. I hesitate to pierce the side of such a God-Man as this, and I quiver out of Awe and Reverence to do my duty. As the remaining last drops of His Blood mix with Water and rain down upon this wretched soul, I am Blessed, for *Truly this was the Son of God*.

The Tenth Station

Jesus is stripped of His garments

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH JUDAS ISCARIOT

Judas. What have you done? This is all wrong. You've done it again. You always want to rush *everything*. When things don't go your way, you get spiteful and bitter and angry and mess up *everything*! Why did you go to the priests? Because He wasn't who you expected Him to be? Wasn't changing things fast enough? The evil in you has hardened your heart and rotted your mind. You had Him arrested to make a profit!? Did you really think it would force Him to reveal His Might? That the others would praise you for being so bold where He was not yet willing to go? Yes... and No. You are so much worse than that. You coward! You saw that He was the Messiah. You *believed* that... once. So how did you get here? Are you bitter that He isn't, yet still wishing that He was. But you chose to turn away and now Jesus is dying! This is all your fault Judas! How could you?! He was so kind and caring and patient with you. He knew who you were, and yet, He always accepted you. Always forgave you. Continued to let you draw close and gave you second chances when no one else in your life ever did. He encouraged you where others criticized. And all you offered Him was a kiss... in vain. You were not even remorseful when you did. He who believed you could change, while others only ridiculed you. He even put you in charge of the money bag knowing full well of your inability to control your desire to steal from it. He expected a change in you. A change in me? But I could not change. I tried. I failed. With all my will I tried and failed! No. No. *He knew* this would happen. *He knew* I could not change! *He knew* I would betray Him. He even said so. This isn't *my* fault. This is *His* fault! *You* allowed it! This is *Your* fault! You hear me! You could have stopped me! You didn't stop me! Why didn't YOU STOP ME!! You made me do it. Do You hate me, Lord?! Am I just dirt to You?! Am I not worthy to be at Your table?! So unworthy that You made me leave Your table! *Oh GOD! I DID THIS ON PURPOSE! Dear God, NOOO!!! This IS ALL MY FAULT!*

~ Silence ~

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. But this is unforgivable. What I have done... unforgivable. No mercy available to one such as me. None of the others could do such a thing. I have blamed you for my sins. I have denied you. I have run away. None of the others would do such things. Only me. I am alone. Unforgivable. I watch the soldiers strip You of Your clothes. Naked and exposed. They mock You and divide up what is left of Your things. I watch the scene from a distance, and the same experience is in my heart. Divided. Shattered. Exposed. A tragedy I am. You lose Your life because of me, Your work ruined by my actions, Your life ended too soon, and I do not deserve my life because of what has happened to You. The words You spoke are true. They ring over and over in my ears like a death knoll. It *is* better that I not have been born. If only I knew that something good was to come from this, I might go on. But I know it will not. The voices in my head tell me this is the end. I reject the blood money, but it changes nothing. I believe that I am equally rejected by God. Hope is gone. You spoke of resurrection, but that is impossible now. There will be no more story of Yours to tell, so my story must also end. As I put the noose around my neck, I ask one last hopeless request from the God whom I have betrayed. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.

The Eleventh Station

Jesus is nailed to the Cross

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST AND LUCIFER, THE FALLEN ANGEL

“So here we are. King of the Jews? The Christ of God? The Messiah? Is this how you imaged it? Was this your Big Plan? I offered you a way out in the desert. You didn’t take it. Freedom from this pursuit of yours for people who despise you. The *dust* who crucifies you here doesn’t love you any more than the dust of the desert. I offered you Power in this world you made that has gone totally wrong. Instead of turning stone to bread, you chose to turn bread into flesh? They will never buy it. Trust ME. I sell ideas to them all the time. Have been since the Garden. Remember. Who of them has faith to believe something like bread could be changed into God’s Flesh? A people who justify every one of their beliefs. Make excuses for their actions. Blame everyone else for what is wrong around them when they themselves are just as guilty. Where are they while you are nailed to this tree for them? You know they will turn this event around and blame *You*. They will say “*Where were you in my struggles?*” Your own disciples do it even now. Look... *gone*. Scattered like the rodents they are. All but a few weeping women and a pathetic boy out of fear for your woman. Not for love of you, but that *woman*. She is the vile one. *Not I!* Look at her. Weak and inadequate. Where is her power? If I cannot tempt you. I *can* tempt her. She is not God. She is dust like the rest. You began this mission upon her acceptance though. *Why?* What do you owe this creature? Nothing. Yet you have to honor her? Obey her? *Why?* Because of some Commandment made by your Father? Ha! Moses is dead and so are those Commandments. The people have made a countless amount of their own rules since, and do not even follow your simple ones. Watch as I break her before your eyes the way these people break your commandments. No mother would allow her innocent son to die like this knowing that all she had to do was tell him to stop and by your own Commandment, you would honor her over your mission... because if not you would then be guilty of sinning yourself. Wouldn’t you? Oh, the *perplexity!* And yet... simplicity. Let us see how well this Plan of yours truly works.”

Satan whispers into the ear of the High Priest, and the priest repeats the words, “*He saved others. Let him save himself if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God.*” A soldier says, “*If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself.*” And the criminal on the left side of Jesus says, “*Are You not the Christ? Save yourself and us.*”

“*Her heart too will be pierced.*” I know how the prophecy went. Do you let her die from this piercing? Let her die in anguish with you? Do you not care for your mother and her breaking heart? You remain silent. Do you have nothing to say?”

“*Woman. Behold your son... Behold your Mother.*”

“Aaaarrrrrrrgggh!! Impossible! She has NO power of her own! How does she not break?! Curse this *woman!* This *creature!* This *dust!* She must not love you then! None of them love you! They have all abandoned you! The one you call Peter has denied you three times already, and now cowers shamefully in the shadows. I shall have him soon just as I have already taken the other one. The betrayer. He was easy. So prone to simple temptations. Blind and foolish. I entered Judas when he invited me in through his criticizing, complaining, bickering, blaming. You knew it. I turned him through his continual stealing and lying. You watched it happen. These sins fed his pride and

greed, and I had him. You allowed it. You told him *"What you are doing, do quickly."* He did, and in shame he forfeited his life void of hope. He is mine and you lead him to me. How does it feel? To lose the one for the ninety nine? Not a very Good Shepherd are we then? Unless... there is something I do not see? But you are not deceitful. So what could it be? What are you doing hanging from this tree anyway? I attempted many times to have you killed and you always evaded me. Why allow this time? In this way? What is different? I do not see anything unique about it except for the Pleasure I recieved in watching it. But ahh... I can see by your exhaustion that your death is near. I have won. And soon I will have all of the others. All of them taken from you. You love them all, but receive little love in return. These worthless creatures are so easy to draw into sin. They invite me in themselves by their own doing. Even your few so-called disciples. They have no power of their own, just like this woman, only that you continually give them grace that they are completely unaware of. They reject you and disregard you. Clueless and ungrateful. Why do you continue to care for them and give to them? They are DUST! What about ME?! You made ME powerful like yourself. The BARER of your light! Who else can bare your light besides *you*?! ME! I was a God like you, only to have a lesser angel cast me from your presence because I would not serve dust!! *"Micha'el?! Who is like God?!"* he said. Who is *he* to cast ME to this wretched wasteland?! And where is he now? Where are your legions of angels to guard you?! You have been forsaken by the Father and your children! Dying now... like this. Was this your All Mighty Plan from the Beginning? To die a meaningless death?! *Ha!"*

"Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?"

A witness continues the Psalm. *"Far from my prayer, from the words of my cry?"* One by one other voices join in. *"O my God, I cry out by day, and you answer not..."*

"What...? What is this? What is happening? Wait... What have you done?! No. I see it now. No. *No! How could I miss it?!* Blinded by my own hatred for them I did not see it. I was so consumed with taking their souls that I did not see what you were doing! You were not being torn down. You're *building!* No. Come down from that tree! You cannot die! NO! NO! Save him!! Any one of you pathetic human slugs! *Hear me!* Oh no... It is too late for them to hear! They are too enraged by their sins and fear! The sin is too much. It cannot be stopped! A house divided. And the only one who can stop this besides you... She will not listen to my temptations either... because She loves You." ~ *spit.*

"I thirst."

"Do NOT give him that to drink! I command you slave! You belong to ME! Listen to ME!! In defiance, refuse to give it! Stop your arrogance and mockery. Despise him instead! He's not worth quenching! No. It is too late. There are too many Sins. This foolish dirt quenches the Thirst and fulfills your Words. No! What is this I now see coming from the sky above? A light piercing the heavens?! No. I see them! Veiled! The angels of Heaven have been veiled!! I have played right into His Hands! I have lost! I spite *YOU* and *THIS Day!* And I vow to steal as many of them from You as I can, even though You are the Victor. I do not care what they are, these creatures of dust. They mean nothing! They are ashes! You are ALL that is and it is *YOU* I HATE. I will HURT *YOU* by taking as many of them from *YOU* as I can. *YOU* who love them enough to do this! I spit venom at *YOU!* You have come and stolen them back from ME and MY world...A stronger Man has entered MY house while I was unaware... and has won. I am shame."

"It is Finished."

The Twelfth Station

Jesus dies on the Cross

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH HIS FRIENDS AND FOLLOWERS

“I remember rejoicing when Jesus healed my eyes, and I regained my sight. But this is a terrible sight to see. Now I wish I were still blind so I would not have to witness the horror of Jesus dying before my eyes.”

“I am no longer deaf since He laid His hands upon my ears, and I could not stop my ears from hearing the dreadful agony of Jesus’ pain and suffering. But now, possibly even worse, is the sound of His silence as He just hangs on the cross waiting for death to take Him. I am grateful to hear again, if only I did not have to hear these things.”

“This Son of Man cured my servant, and now the authority I serve under has put Him to death. With whom does my allegiance lie?”

“I was one of those that Jesus healed. He cured my sickness, and forgave me of my many sins. But now He is going. What will I do when I fall into sin again? To whom shall I seek if He is dead?”

“He cured me from leprosy. I walk freely amongst other men now, but where will I go if He is not here for me to walk with Him?”

“His teachings healed my heart and my family. I watched Him multiply loaves and fish, and saw Him heal the sick and lame.”

“He healed my hemorrhages.”

“He saved me from stoning.”

“He cast out my demons.”

“I was dead, and He called me back to life. Is it not possible that He could do the same for Himself?”

~ Silence ~

“I gaze upon Your lifeless body, the body and blood of the Son of God who breathed life back into me when You forgave me of my sins. There are no words to express the anguish I feel. I am dry and empty inside. But through the pain, I still hear the words You said to me. ‘Then neither do I condemn you.’ They comfort my heart, but I am still in utter grief. I believe You have done this out of Love for us all, yet I do not understand. Why such a way as this?”

“We sit together, some of the remaining disciples, confused and praying for a miracle to end this insanity, but there is no response from Heaven. If You are the most powerful Almighty God, now would be a good time to show us all. What is the meaning of all of all this? Please save us. Show us a sign.”

“I was so sure of myself that I would be with You unto death. I expected even to be by Your side in the Kingdom of Heaven with my brother John, though I watch now from afar trembling in fear. How could I be by Your side there for all eternity, when I lack the courage to be by Your side here on this singular day?”

“I weep alone on the floor in a strange place after lying that I even knew You. The first time I denied You was just so that I could get past the gate to be near You and see what they were doing to You. Why did I want to see You, but not be willing to stand with You? The second time was near a campfire. I watched how they treated You, and heard how they questioned You. If *You* gave no answers that would appease them... how could I have had any answers? We would both surely die. I could not go where You were going. I began to doubt myself then, just like on the water, and again, I sank into the deep. So when they confronted me that second time, I replied out of fear. *I do not know the man*. I do not know the man? How could I say such a thing?! By the third time, the duality within me had grown from doubt in myself to doubt in You, Lord. How could I have walked down such a path? So far away? One who had been witness to so much. One who has loved you so much. I even saw Your Face on the mountain. Saw the Face of God and lived... and I denied even knowing You. Three times. Just as You said. I heard the cock’s cry this awful morning, and fell to my knees. Alone. Ashamed. Yet where else can I turn, but to God.”

“I kneel upon harsh stones, and ponder what You have done, my Son. What You have been preparing to do all these years as I watched You grow. Your Grace fills me as always, though I feel all my pain. I am grieved for what You have had to go through and endure. My heart too is pierced in so many ways, yet I am grateful that this is so close to ending soon. Father, continue to give me the Grace to make it these last few moments. Your Mission is ending. Now, the fulfillment of Your Work can begin.”

“Father, into Your Hands I commend my Spirit.”

The Thirteenth Station

Jesus is taken down from the Cross

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST AND JOSEPH, HIS FATHER
AS MARY HOLDS THE DECEASED BODY OF JESUS

“Joseph.”

“My boy, there you are. I have been waiting for You here. How long have we been apart?”

“Long enough, Abba.”

“Is your mother with you?”

“She will be joining us shortly, but not here. There is much yet to be done.”

“Let me look upon You. This face. You are a man. What are these? Holes in Your head? In Your hands? Were You not careful with the tools I gave You?” Joseph smiles.

“Very careful, Father. These... I received from many of the tools You gave me. The gifts of virtue that you taught me as a child, and into my manhood. Your example. Your lessons. Your guidance. Your obedience and devotion to God the Father. I could not have become the Man required for the Mission without you, my father. I thank you with all my heart, Joseph.”

“You made me that way.”

“True. But you did not have to choose it. You still had your free will. You could have chosen to walk away early on, but you did not.”

“Why would I choose anything other than the Father’s Will which is most wonderful?”

“You continually amaze me, Joseph.”

“I would say the same about You, my boy, but how could You not amaze me? You are an amazing God. But what truly could I, a man, have taught You who are the Divine King, the Creator God?”

“True that I AM God. But Also, I AM Man. And as Man, I needed to be raised from infancy, taught as every youth, labor and rest as every man. That, I learned from you and Mother as the Father intended.”

~ Silence as they embrace ~

“Now... You best be to Your task. It is not yet the Sabbath, boy. This is no time to Rest. This is a day for Work.”

“And which Work might that be, Abba?” Jesus says with a smile inherent of Joseph’s.

“Child, a father doesn’t raise a boy from infancy and not see what his son is up to as he grows into a man. Especially one who asked so... many... questions.”

“I love all my creations, Joseph, but you are one of my favorites.”

“Ha! Now, come. The others will be excited to finally meet You. Abraham is especially jealous of Moses and Elijah since You pulled that trick on the mountain for Your three disciples.”

“We call them miracles, Abba.”

“Jesus. You made me a carpenter. I’m just speaking the language.”

“Yes. I also made you a Son of David. So Father, as heir of the Kingdom, join me, Prince of Heaven, as I gather the others.”

The Fourteenth Station

Jesus is laid in the tomb

AN ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST THROUGH MARY, HIS MOTHER
AS SHE CONSOLES THE DISCIPLES WHOSE HEADS HANG LOWERED IN SILENCE

Children. We must be at peace. I hear you and see you reliving the events of today since our Jesus was sealed in the tomb. Frightened and confused. Wondering what you could have done different to save Him. Regretful of your own actions. Angry at the actions of others. Betrayed by one of your own. But I tell you, it was all necessary. The Father had to allow ALL of these things, so that ALL could be Redeemed. Grace was restricted and Sin abound so that Grace could flourish all the more through Jesus. It was a hard challenge for each of us, but even more so for the Father Himself who had to act in Love because He is Love.

Some of you knew my husband, Joseph, as the father of Jesus, but Jesus' true Father is God, the Father of us all. My true Spouse is the Heavenly Spirit who descended upon me to conceive in my womb, Emanuel. So even though Joseph, my husband, has departed, my Holy Spouse, the Father of Jesus, has not left my side since the announcement by the Angel. The Father guides me through the Grace of my Holy Spouse, His Glorious and Holy Spirit, and my soul proclaims His greatness. My spirit still rejoices in God our Savior. Since that Blessed day when His Holy Spirit descended upon this handmaid, Jesus has been with me. He has lived within me and without me, but always near and never far. Though sometimes separated by distance, I could always feel His presence and His peace. But once His death was completed, and even as I held His body close to mine, I finally felt the overwhelming emptiness of total separation from Him. A stone has been placed between us, and I am dead inside. Cut off from our Lord. I feel only the cold darkness in this valley of death and my soul is in agony. My womb and my heart are desolate. I have lost my child and my God, though I believe that His Holy Spirit remains with me somewhere that I am not permitted to see right now.

And as painful as this is, I Trust in Jesus that He will be Faithful to His Word. You must do the same for it is written about in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms. Listen to the Father's voice through Isaiah. *"Because of His affliction He shall see the light in fullness of days; through His suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt He shall bear. Therefore I will give Him His portion among the great, and He shall divide the spoils with the mighty, because He surrendered Himself to death and was counted among the wicked; and He shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses."* Jesus does this now. And His Spirit must be elsewhere to do this Work.

Remember the bronze serpent Moses mounted upon the pole was *what Healed* the serpent's bite; how Hosea spoke and said *"He will revive us after two days; on the third day he will raise us up to live in his presence."* Remember in your grief that Jesus told the money changers *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* How often did Jesus tell us that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and rise on the third day. And do you forget what miracle He did for Lazarus?

We must hold on to His words and His miracles in this time of His departure. He will return. He will rise again. We do not know what that looks like just yet, but Trust my Son and His Word. This is not the first time for me to experience His death and resurrection. Do you remember I once told you that we lost Jesus when He was a boy? That event has been on my heart since I let go of Him and He was laid in the tomb.

Jesus was twelve. It was morning when we left Jerusalem for home from the Passover. It was a large caravan of family and friends. Jesus had been with the other children, and I thought He was with them when they ran ahead to be with Joseph and the other men. Joseph thought He must have stayed back with me since He wasn't among the children who arrived. We did not know He had stayed in Jerusalem without us until we stopped mid-day to rest many miles away from Him. When Joseph and I realized He was missing, we return to Jerusalem in haste. It was a long night... *two* long nights. Joseph and I could not believe we had lost the Son of God. My heart felt pain that it had never felt before. Together, we had to put our faith and trust in the Father. As we searched, we prayed to the Spirit to keep our son, His Son, safe until we found Him again. It was a painful time of feeling lost ourselves, but the Spirit consoled me through Joseph while we waited for the Father to reveal what He was doing. I thought of the prophecy that my heart would be pierced, and wondered if it was being fulfilled that day. Those days were the hardest and longest and loneliest days in our life as a family, but I discovered in time that the Father was simply preparing my heart for another day. This day. On the third day of our search, Jesus returned to us, and the joy was immeasurable. And so again this will be. Just as He has been telling us. Trust in Jesus. Believe in His Word. Though this hurts beyond measure, we do not yet know the Joy that is in store to come.

~ Silence ~

You know, losing Jesus as a child was not enjoyable or funny at the time, but Jesus liked to bring it up from time to time in the years that followed when Joseph corrected him for misplacing tools in his shop. He always did it in such a way to make us smile and laugh, and it reminded us of how much we loved Him. So again, I tell you, my children, though it is hard to believe in this place that Jesus will come back to life again, just as He did for His parents when He was a child... He will Rise. The Temple will be built in three days as He said. Believe and we shall see. For now, we must wait, while He is at Work in His Father's House. And so, I ask you to join me in waiting as I pray for Jesus now at the hour of His death.

Amen.

All Things Made New
THE NEW BEGINNING