

## The Way of the Cross

### **I. Prayer**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation." (Luke 22:39-46)

### **Meditation:**

*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.*

What cup? The cup of God's wrath against the sin of the world. This dreaded cup Jesus would drink down completely, not one drop remaining. He would take upon Himself the guilt of the sin of all the world, and pay the price for it all. We see a lot of sin in our world, from poison gas attacks in Syria, to terrorism, to murder, to hatred and violence, abuse of young and old, robbery, adultery - imagine all of that sin and then more, from every age and time, all in one place. All on one man. And that one man declared guilty for it all and paying the price for it. That's what Jesus was about to do.

And not just for the sin of the *world*, but for *your* sin. And the spectre of that was agonizing. He knew how serious this was, and what awaited Him on the cross.

Do we? Or do we take our sin lightly and not really think much of it. Perhaps today we should reconsider, and realize just how deadly sin is.

Jesus will go through with it. This was the plan from eternity. That the sinless Son of God would offer His life for the life of the world. And so while praying in the Garden, His sweat begins to drop from Him like great drops of blood - the drops of blood that in mere hours would come dropping, oozing, and streaming from His battered and crucified body. An angel comes to strengthen Him now. There would be no angel later. He would do this alone. One man would drink the cup, that all men and women be spared. That you be spared. For the cup that is for you is not this cup, the cup of God's wrath, but the cup Jesus fills with His blood - the cup of blessing. The cup of His Supper. The cup that gives you the forgiveness of your sins and eternal life.

So let us pray, a prayer of thanksgiving. Let us pray that we not enter into temptation of sin. Let us pray for our Lord's will to be done. Yes, His good and perfect will.

## **II. Betrayal and Denial**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, "Have you come

out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:47-62)

### **Meditation:**

Peter is all about saving life. He wants to save Jesus' life with the sword, he wants to save his own life with his denials. It is what we do. When attacked we attack back. When accused we deny. We try to save ourselves. We try to save our reputation. We try to save our honor, our position, all that we think we need in this world and life.

Jesus does not. He gives His life for others. *No more of this*, He tells those who draw the sword. And *no more of this* He tells us who seek to save our own lives.

For why do we try to save ourselves? It is because we do not realize our life is a gift. Our life and all that we are and all that we have is a gift from our Father in heaven. And if He gave it, He will care for it. If He gave it, He will preserve it. If He gave it, He will provide for it. But we doubt that; we fear; we try to hold onto what we have rather

than hold onto the One who gave it. And that's idolatry . . . and why Peter denied even knowing Jesus three times.

And then the alarm clock went off. The rooster crowed. And Peter realized what he had done. What will be the alarm clock for us? Martin Luther wrote in his famous hymn: *And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, they yet have nothing won, the kingdom ours remaineth*. When you know that, when you believe that, then you are free. Truly free. Free like Jesus. To give your life for others. Because you know you cannot outgive God. If you give, He gives more. And if you lose your life, He gives it back. Better, in fact. Giving you a life that will never end.

*So no more of this!* No more betrayal or denial. Jesus gives His life for you. His hour is the hour of darkness and evil, that your hour be the hour of goodness and light. With not a rooster crowing, but angels singing.

### **III. Condemnation**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. . . . Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. I will therefore punish and release him.”

But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has

he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will. (Luke 23:1, 13-25)

### **Meditation:**

Pilate was right: Jesus was *not guilty*. Three times, in fact, Pilate rendered that judgment. Jesus was not misleading the people - He spoke the truth. He lived the truth. He was the truth.

But the truth does not always win in our world, does it? The loudest voices, the more insistent, the most persistent often get their way. The side of the truth, in fact, can be an awfully lonely place sometimes. The truth can be inconvenient. The truth can go against what I feel. The truth can make my life harder. So, maybe, we tell a little white lie. We deceive, mislead, purposely say things in a way that is vague and hard to pin down. Many in our world today have practically made this an art form. From presidents to beggars in the street. We don't want the truth to get in our way.

And so true is this for the chief priests and rulers of the people that rather than having to face the truth that Jesus speaks, they'd rather face the danger Barabbas brought - of insurrection and murder. And so Barabbas, the dangerous and guilty one, is released, and Jesus, the loving and innocent one, is crucified.

So what will it be for us? The truth? What is the truth? *I am a poor, miserable sinner*. But this too: *in Jesus, your sins are forgiven*. If that's not your truth, if you deny your sin, then you also deny your Saviour. Better, then, the truth. For the truth gives us Jesus. The truth is Jesus. The truth that Jesus took our place as the sinner, so that we

could have His place as the Son. The truth that with our sin Jesus really is the guilty one, and with our sin forgiven, we really are not guilty. And that really is the truth. In Jesus.

#### **IV. Bearing the Cross**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:26-31)

#### **Meditation:**

Was it an honor? Was it an inconvenience? Was it an embarrassment? Was it a horror? What did Simon of Cyrene think when they singled him out from the crowd and dropped Jesus’ cross on his shoulder? We’re not told. Perhaps we will find out one day.

But if he is anything like us, he didn’t want it and didn’t like it. For we do not like the crosses we are given to bear in our lives. The trials and troubles given to us in our callings; given to us for our good. Given to us to slay the old sinful, selfish, rebellious man in us, that a new man can live.

But it wasn't only Simon that followed Jesus - *there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him*. But Jesus doesn't want their pity. *Do not weep for me*, Jesus says. He *wants* to go to the cross. But there is coming a time when they, too, will have to bear the cross. A time when things would be so bad that they would *begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'* And at just such a time in their lives, and in our lives, we are the ones who need pity - and we have it. Jesus pity. His compassion and mercy. The compassion and mercy He showed us in going to the cross for us will continue when we bear our crosses. And though things might be so bad as to wish the mountains would fall on us and the hills cover us, we have what is much better: *Jesus covering us*. Jesus putting Himself between us and all the forces of evil, so that we are safe from all harm and danger. Safe under His shelter and care.

So for now, we bear the cross, like Simon. But we will not bear it long. The cross had its day. But Jesus has eternity.

## **V. Forgiveness**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save

yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." (Luke 23:32-38)

### **Meditation:**

*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

Pontius Pilate knew Jesus did nothing deserving death, but handed Him over to be crucified anyway. The Roman soldiers were just carrying out orders. The Jewish rulers brought all this about, but what did they understand? Did they know what they were doing? Do we?

The truth is that often, we don't. We don't always realize that the small things we do can have big consequences. And when it comes to our sin, do we know what we are doing? Do we know the hurt we cause to others? The hurt we cause to ourselves? The hurt we cause God? We don't. We don't know. We don't realize.

But Jesus knows. He knows the serious consequences of sin - He is hanging for our sin. He knows how deadly sin is - He is dying for our sin. He knows the punishment due sin - He is being crushed under it, for you. And He knows exactly what He is doing. Pilate may not. The Soldiers may not. The Jewish rulers may not. We may not. But Jesus knows exactly. That's why He came, and why He is there, on the cross, and dying.

And why He's there is this: *Father, forgive them*. Pour out Your wrath on me, here, now, instead of them. Crush me, here, now, instead of them. And set them free. *Father, forgive them*. And He does. And you are. Forgiven. Free.

And so now we pray a prayer like Jesus': *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*. Father, grant me the forgiveness Jesus won for me on the

cross, and help me forgive others - just as Jesus did on the cross. Because of what He did for me - and for all people - help me rejoice in His words by praying them myself, here, now, for others. *Father, forgive them.*

## **VI. Paradise**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? 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 justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:39-43)

### **Meditation:**

Crucified next to Jesus. We might chalk it up to coincidence that that particular criminal was crucified that particular day and in that particular place, next to the Son of God - but for God, there are no coincidences. He was there for a reason. He was there to see his Saviour and be saved by Him.

Did he know before who this man was? Had he heard Jesus, or heard of Him? Had he witnessed any miracles? We are not told. But this we know: he heard words from Jesus that no one had ever heard from a cross before. Jesus called God His Father. He heard Jesus pray for the forgiveness of those who put Him there. And the Spirit of God worked through that Word of God and created faith in a dying man. And a condemned criminal received a great gift: the gift of eternal life. A day of great horror turned into a

day of great blessing. This day of agony into a day of joy. This day of suffering into a day of peace.

Remember Simeon, in the Temple, after Jesus was born? When he saw the 40 day old Jesus, he took the child in his arms and said: *Lord, now let your servant depart in peace* (Luke 2:29). I have seen my Saviour. I am ready to die. Now, some 30 years later, it is happening again. Jesus tells this criminal: ***Today, you will be with me in Paradise.*** And the criminal can pray the same prayer: *Lord, now let your servant die in peace.* I have seen my Saviour. I am ready to die.

And truly he was. As are you. *For blessed are you who have not seen and yet have believed* (John 20:29). Your faith created in you by the same Word of God. So that whenever you die, however you die, you will not receive the due reward for your deeds, your sins. Because of Jesus, you too can depart in peace. For this is Jesus' word to you as well. That on that day, you will be with Jesus - and with a nameless criminal - in Paradise.

## **VII. Death and Burial**

L: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C: Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.**

It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last. Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent!" And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.

Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and 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 23:44-56)

### **Meditation:**

In six days God created the world. And on the sixth day, when all the work of creation was finished, *God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good* (Genesis 1:31). And on the seventh day, the Sabbath day, God rested.

On the sixth day, God would once again finish all His work - this time not of creation, but of re-creation. *It is finished*, He would say (John 19:30), and then rest. In a tomb. Joseph's tomb. A tomb unpolluted by death. A tomb, like the first creation, where no one had ever been before. Jesus would spend the Sabbath day at rest in the tomb. No more work to be done, for all was done. The work of our redemption finished. The work for our forgiveness finished. The battle against satan and all the forces of evil, finished. The wrath of God against the sin of the world, finished. And the world, created good but then plunged into sin by the first Adam, was good again, by the second Adam. Very good.

And so we call this day Holy and Good Friday. For it is the day when Jesus made all things good again in the forgiveness of sin. The day when the promise made to Adam and Eve was fulfilled - that God would undo what they had done. When One would come to crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). And Jesus had. You could not see that victory

yet. That Friday night and Saturday were sad and difficult days indeed. But the third day was coming, when Jesus would rise victorious and soon they would know.

And so it for us as well. We live in sad and difficult days. But the day of resurrection is coming for us, too. The victory is already ours; we now but wait for the day of its revealing. When the curtain dividing heaven and earth is finally and fully pulled away, and what we now believe we will see. Our Life returning in triumph, calling us from our graves, and taking us with Him through death to life again. That is His promise. First made to Adam, repeated through the ages, and fulfilled in Jesus.

So to our Saviour Jesus Christ, we give all thanks and praise. To our great and victorious Redeemer, be all glory, honor, and worship, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. AMEN.