

**Holy Week 2024**

# Stations of the Cross

A meditation of poems



These poems follow the traditional order for the Stations of the Cross. Some are familiar or by well-known poets; some are old while others are recent or new. But all speak of Jesus however tangentially.

They were chosen to illustrate the impact of the Station on others, or the way other people's actions impacted on Jesus—including mine and yours. Some explore different identities so, for example, Station 6, 'Veronica wipes the face of Jesus' follows the ancient legend that she was the woman Jesus cures of a haemorrhage, Station 7 is spoken by a survivor of Auschwitz, and so on.

These poems should be read slowly and meditatively; a quick read is a cheap read.

## Contents

Stations of the cross, 1: Jesus is condemned to death .....	3
Stations of the cross, 2: Jesus is made to bear his cross .....	4
Stations of the cross, 3: Jesus falls the first time .....	5
Stations of the cross, 4: Jesus meets his mother .....	6
Stations of the cross, 5: Simon of Cyrene is made to bear the cross .....	7
Stations of the cross, 6: Veronica wipes Jesus' face .....	8
Stations of the cross, 7: Jesus falls the second time .....	9
Stations of the cross, 8: The women of Jerusalem weep over Jesus.....	10
Stations of the cross, 9: Jesus falls the third time .....	11
Stations of the cross, 10: Jesus is stripped of his garments .....	12
Stations of the cross, 11: Jesus is nailed to the cross .....	13
Stations of the cross, 13: Jesus dies on the cross .....	14
Stations of the cross, 13: Jesus is taken down from the cross .....	15
Stations of the cross, 14: Jesus is placed in the sepulchre .....	16

**Choice of poems © Revd Dr Paul Monk**

Stations of the cross, 1:

## Jesus is condemned to death

### **Pilate**

Cool water over my fingers flowing.

The upstart

Had ruined a night and a morning for me.

I thrust that stone face from my door.

I was told later he measured his length

Between the cupid and the rose bush.

The gardener told me that later, laughing.

And that a woman hung about him like a fountain.

Another woman stood between him and the sun,

A tree, sifting light and shadow across his face.

Outside the tavern

It was down with him once more, knees and elbows,

Four holes in the dust.

More women then, a gale of them,

His face like a scald

And they moving about him, a tumult of shadows and breezes.

He hung close to the curve of the world.

The king had gone out in a purple coat.

Now the king

Wore only rags of flesh about the bone.

(I examined cornstalks in the store at Joppa

And discovered a black kernel.

Of the seven vats shipped from Rhodes

Two had leaked in the hold,

One fell from the sling and was broken.)

And tell this Arimathean

He can do what he likes with the less-than-shadow.

No more today. That business is over. Pass the seal.

**George Mackay Brown**

Stations of the Cross

Stations of the cross, 2:

## Jesus is made to bear his cross

from **Her Stations of the Cross**

I

Here mothers move more than others  
into Mary's mourning, each chorus  
a soul full of crosses, weighted  
with her child dying  
continuously in the contemplation  
of our contrition.

II

That once-upon-a-time angel's voice  
stretching anew her middle-aged womb,  
she who once sang Magnify, O Magnify,  
when all she screams for now  
is mercy in her urgent rebirth  
of sorrow.

III

When he stumbles,  
she cannot fix his fall,  
cannot cradle the boyhood  
scrapes and bruises bleeding  
into crowd-sanctioned murder.  
No cock crows; she hears his groans  
as if the world's bones  
are splintering within her.

**Marjorie Maddox**

<https://artandtheology.org/2023/09/15/her-stations-of-the-cross-by-marjorie-maddox/comment-page-1>

Stations of the cross, 3:

## Jesus falls the first time

Several times it happened:

He was handed over

By people using authority

But refusing responsibility

Betrayal comes not only

With the words We speak,

But sometimes by

Allowing or encouraging

Events to take their course

Sins not of commission or

Omission, but careless

Permission.

**Ann Lewin**

Watching for the Kingfisher

Stations of the cross, 4:

## Jesus meets his mother

### Jesus meets His Mother

This darker path into the heart of pain  
Was also hers whose love enfolded him  
In flesh and wove him in her womb. Again  
The sword is piercing. She, who cradled him  
And gentled and protected her young son  
Must stand and watch the cruelty that mars  
Her maiden making. Waves of pain that stun  
And sicken pass across his face and hers  
As their eyes meet. Now she enfolds the world  
He loves in prayer; the mothers of the disappeared  
Who know her pain, all bodies bowed and curled  
In desperation on this road of tears,  
All the grief-stricken in their last despair,  
Are folded in the mantle of her prayer.

#### Malcolm Guite

*A Quintet for Mary*

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<https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2022/03/feast-annunciation-quintet-mary-malcolm-guite.html>

Stations of the cross, 5:

## Simon of Cyrene is made to bear the cross

### The crucifixion of Simon the Cyrenian

*And among the Basilideans is it held that, in the place of the Master,  
Simon of Cyrene suffered.*

Your blue lips crack into a clouded message:  
You tell them you are black, a humble man;  
You cannot talk their cold and goblin tongue,  
Your horned feet stuttering on the eye-shafted track.  
What divine order of confusion, Simon,  
Has grown this tree on your derided back?  
The lying muslin of a dream is hung  
And who shall now-undream the laughing murderous stage.  
Your robe torn from you lightly as a leaf  
Dissolves in true tears your false mother's grief;  
Keeping the silence of your God, though still  
Your human cry ring dissolutely shrill  
Their ears hear nothing, though the dying thief  
Have his sharp pardon on the mocking hill.

**Iain Fletcher**

<http://poetrymagazines.org.uk/magazine/record0487>

Stations of the cross, 6:

## Veronica wipes Jesus' face

### Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

*There is an ancient legend that identifies Veronica, who comforted Jesus on the way to Calvary, with the woman whom he healed of a haemorrhage earlier in His ministry.*

Salted with grains of blood his cheek  
Pearls flung from the crazy crown  
That jaunts on his burning, sweat-thatched head  
Through the leering, holy-day town:

The dizzy clang of the soldiers, and the jerky falling down  
Like a broken doll in the dust, and the spit and the slime.  
And time pleats back like a robe and I gasp and I bow  
To the stench and the shame and the sting  
Of other blood, in another crowd,  
In another, simpler spring.  
In that hidden, stagnant place, I feel the kick and the dance  
Of pattering mercy, quickening grace, my unpractised fingers glance  
At his shining, tattered face, and fast  
I hold, as shielding him, lulling him then,  
comfort-clothed in Jerusalem:  
I stand tall, a mother at last.

**Sr Ann Catherine Swailes**

<https://www.stonedominicans.org/en/news/68-holy-week-poems-1-veronica-wipes-the-face-of-jesus>



Stations of the cross, 7:

## Jesus falls the second time

### **The way of the cross in Auschwitz-Birkenau**

In Auschwitz many fell under the cross that was put upon them.

The worse part wasn't the suffering,

but the pain caused by the defeat and the wreck of all humanity.

The rivalry between the prisoners in the fight for survival

was often so immense that it was difficult to maintain solidarity.

A survivor stated:

One had to be a saint to share one's bread.

It was harder than to go to the gas chamber.

None the less there were such people.

**Anonymous**

<https://cdim.pl/en/texts/the-way-of-the-cross-in-birkenau>

Stations of the cross, 8:

## The women of Jerusalem weep over Jesus

He falls and stumbles with us, hurt again  
But still he holds the road and looks in love  
On all of us who look on him. Our pain  
As close to him as his. These women move  
Compassion in him as he does in them.  
He asks us both to weep and not to weep.  
Women of Gaza and Jerusalem,  
Women of every nation where the deep  
Wounds of memory divide the land  
And lives of all your children, where the mines  
Of all our wars are sown: Afghanistan,  
Iraq, the Cote d'Ivoire ... he reads the signs  
And weeps with you and with you he will stay  
Until the day he wipes your tears away.

### **Malcolm Guite**

Reproduced with permission, from Good Friday: Stations of the Cross

<https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2012/04/04/good-friday-the-stations-of-the-cross>

Stations of the cross, 9:

## Jesus falls the third time

### The Carpenter's Son

Here the hangman stops his cart:  
Now the best of friends must part.  
Fare you well, for ill fare I:  
Live, lads, and I will die.

'Oh, at home had I but stayed  
'Prenticed to my father's trade,  
Had I stuck to plane and adze,  
I had not been lost, my lads.

'Then I might have built perhaps  
Gallows-trees for other chaps,  
Never dangled on my own,  
Had I left but ill alone.

'Now, you see, they hang me high,  
And the people passing by  
Stop to shake their fists and curse;  
So 'tis come from ill to worse.

'Here hang I, and right and left  
Two poor fellows hang for theft:  
All the same's the luck we prove,  
Though the midmost hangs for love.

'Comrades all, that stand and gaze,  
Walk henceforth in other ways;  
See my neck and save your own:  
Comrades all, leave ill alone.

'Make some day a decent end,  
Shrewder fellows than your friend.  
Fare you well, for ill fare I:  
Live lads, and I will die.'

**A E Housman**

<https://allpoetry.com/The-Carpenter%27s-Son>

Stations of the cross, 10:

## Jesus is stripped of his garments

### The Agonie

Philosophers have measur'd mountains,  
Fathom'd the depths of seas, of states, and kings,  
Walk'd with a staffe to heav'n, and traced fountains:

But there are two vast, spacious things,  
The which to measure it doth more behove:  
Yet few there are that sound them; Sinne and Love.

Who would know Sinne, let him repair  
Unto Mount Olivet; there shall he see  
A man so wrung with pains, that all his hair,  
His skinne, his garments bloudie be.  
Sinne is that presse and vice, which forceth pain  
To hunt his cruell food through ev'ry vein.

Who knows not Love, let him assay  
And taste that juice, which on the crosse a pike  
Did set again abroach; then let him say  
If ever he did taste the like.  
Love is that liquour sweet and most divine,  
Which my God feels as bloud; but I, as wine.

**George Herbert**

[https://www.georgeherbert.org.uk/archives/selected\\_work\\_34.html](https://www.georgeherbert.org.uk/archives/selected_work_34.html)

Stations of the cross, 11:

## Jesus is nailed to the cross

### In church

Often I try  
To analyse the quality  
Of its silences. Is this where God hides  
From my searching? I have stopped to listen,  
After the people have gone,  
to the air recomposing itself  
For vigil. It has waited like this  
Since the stones grouped themselves about it.  
These are the hard ribs  
Of a body that our prayers have failed  
To animate. Shadows advance  
From their corners to take possession  
Of places the light held  
For an hour. The bats resume  
Their business. The uneasiness of the pews  
Ceases. There is no other sound  
In the darkness but the sound of a man  
Breathing, testing his faith  
On emptiness, nailing his questions  
One by one to an untenanted cross.

**R S Thomas**

*Collected Poems*

Stations of the cross, 13:

## Jesus dies on the cross

### **Crossroads (the centurion at the Crucifixion)**

I cursed my luck, on duty in that heat:  
The flies, the blood, the stench of death.  
It was the loneliest place I've ever known,  
Standing beside that cross. The crowds  
Hurling abuse engulfed me with their hate;  
Had he no friends? Standing not far away,  
The women had more courage than the men,  
But even his God, it seemed, had left him.  
I've seen some crucifixions in my time,  
But never one like this: the victim  
More concerned for others than himself,  
Asking forgiveness for his murderers.  
And then that awful darkness, when the  
World died with him, and the cry that  
Pierced the darkness pierced me too.  
Did he say, 'Finished'? The way I feel,  
It's only just begun.

**Ann Lewin**

*Watching for the Kingfisher*

Stations of the cross, 13:

## Jesus is taken down from the cross

### **The dream of the Rood**

They snatched that almighty one,  
hefting him from hard heaviness.  
Fierce to fight, they've forsaken me  
to stand there, made to drape blood,  
put through with piercing.

They laid him down, weary limbs,  
attending him at the body's head,  
winding up the lord of heavens,  
while that one slumbered for some time,  
wearied by so much winning.

Right away they wrung him a warren—  
that company in sight of slayers—  
carving it from carbuncle, chalcedony  
setting him thereon, the player of fortune.

They set up too a sorrowing song,  
wretching in eventides, wanting  
to venture out at once,  
wearied on behalf of  
that ever-known lord—  
still among that stilted circle.

### **The Dream of the Rood**

The cross itself narrates the crucifixion in this tenth-century Anglo-Saxon  
(lines 60b-74)

<https://oldenglishpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/dream-of-the-rood>

Stations of the cross, 14:

## Jesus is placed in the sepulchre

Today a grave holds him  
who holds creation in his hand.  
A gravestone covers him  
who covers the heavens with glory.  
Life sleeps. Hell trembles.  
The human race waits with bated breath.  
We have been buried with Christ through  
baptism.  
In faith we will journey with him into dark and  
unknown places.  
He who holds all things together  
was lifted up on the cross  
and all creation lamented.  
The sun hid its rays.  
The stars withheld their light.  
The earth shook in fear.  
The seas fled and the rocks were split.  
Tombs were opened.  
The bodies of holy people were raised.  
The nether world groaned.  
The authorities spread a false report  
about Christ's resurrection.  
All creation waits with bated breath.  
We have been buried with Christ through  
baptism.  
In faith we will journey with him into dark and  
unknown places.

**Ray Simpson**

Liturgies from Lindisfarne

based on an Orthodox hymn for matins on Holy Saturday:

<https://anglicanprayer.wordpress.com/2015/04/04/today-a-grave-holds-him>