

Via Dolorosa

Introduction

Luke 23:26 And they led him away.

The Via Dolorosa also known as the “Way of Sorrows” or “Way of Grief” is the traditional route that Jesus took through the streets of Jerusalem carrying the cross to his crucifixion.

When I was in Israel, with a group from Our Savior’s, we walked the Via Dolorosa, devotionally.

It was a deeply moving experience for me and I have in the past shared photos from the traditional locations that are the basis for the Stations of the Cross.

Sometimes we forget that the streets Jesus traveled were just that, everyday ordinary streets with shops and homes on each side. Many of the people who witnessed Jesus journey through the streets to the crucifixion were just by standers going about their typical Friday activities.

Many of us will not be traveling to Jerusalem to walk the Via Dolorosa, but still the story of Jesus death and resurrection has deep meaning for all people in all places.

As part of her Lenten discipline, Ruthie Melzer took photos of roads around Neenah. Each week she has been adding to her collection in our display case in the Gathering Area.

With these pictures, she has posted questions for us to ponder. In a way she was creating her own Via Dolorosa. It occurred to me a few weeks ago that it might be meaningful for us tonight if we combined the roads: the one in Jerusalem and the ones here in the Fox Valley.

Though some of the events remembered tonight are not biblical, but rather traditional, the journey from Jesus’

condemnation, to his burial, still has the power to deepen our faith.

Each step along the way, gives us an opportunity to consider the pain and agony of Jesus’ sacrifice and the gift of salvation given to us.

Tonight, each stop along the way will be an opportunity for you to reflect.

- As you do this, I want you to think of your reflection as prayer.
It doesn’t need to be an intellectual exercise.
- It will take some imagination. It’s not about historical accuracy but rather the "meaning" of Jesus’ passion and death for you in this place and time in your life.
- You may also think about your own everyday experiences or stories from the headlines that might relate to the events of Jesus crucifixion.
- The ultimate goal is to deepen your faith and gratitude for what Christ endured willingly for you and for your salvation today.

Stations

1) Jesus is condemned to “death by crucifixion”.

John 19:14 Now, it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. Pilate said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” They cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.” Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

The Via Dolorosa begins in the courtyard of the Al-Umariya School. The actual station is inside the school. The Church

of the Condemnation and Imposition of the Cross and the Church of Flagellation are two chapels of the Franciscans which stand partially over the Lithostratos (the Roman road with the striated stones) and the Antonio Fortress, where traditionally, Jesus was condemned to death

There comes a time in our faith journeys when you will have to choose between God's will and your own. Sometimes, following Jesus will make your life harder. **Are there choices you are faced with right now? Have you already made a choice that now appears to lead in the wrong direction? Pause.**

It is never too late to find your way home. Jesus says I am the way and the truth and the life.

2) Jesus Bears the Cross.

John 19:1, 2, 16, 17 Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. He handed Jesus over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull which in Hebrew is Golgotha.

Near the second station is The Arch of Ecce Homo, where traditionally Pilate tried to give Jesus his freedom by letting the people choose. Two men are brought forward, Jesus the Galilean and Jesus Barabbas. The crowd chooses Barabbas and Pilate cries *Ecce Homo*.

Here is an ancient example of The Game of Kings, carved into the stone road. It reminds us of Christ's suffering at the hands of the soldiers.

What burdens or crosses do you bare in life? Are they heavy or light? Why? Pause

Again we are not alone in this life. Christ bares our burdens with us.

HYMN O Sacred Head Now Wounded #351 vs. 1,2,3

3) Jesus falls the first time.

Lamentations 1:16 For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my courage; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed

There is no biblical support for the popular tradition that says Jesus stumbled three times during his walk along the route. There is a relief of Jesus falling under the cross over the door to the Armenian Church. Here we can remember the excessive punishment Jesus has already endured. His body is weakened by pain and agony.

Jesus knows the experience of vulnerability.

As you consider the world you live in, what brings tears to your eyes?

What causes you to stumble in your life? Pause.

Jesus knows the pain of all those who suffer in this world! He has compassion and he weeps.

4) Jesus meets his mother Mary.

Lamentations 1:12 "All you who pass, look and see: is any sorrow like the sorrow that afflicts me?"

Tradition says that Jesus' mother stood by the roadside in order to see her Son. Here, in this little Armenian chapel, her grief and her sadness are remembered. Inside a beautiful mosaic floor can be found with an outline of sandals which some believe mark the exact spot where Saint Mary stood as Jesus passed by, carrying the cross.

Jesus sees the love, strength and pain in his mother's eyes.

When have you witness the pain of a loved one?

When have you felt helpless in the face of grief?

When has your mere presence been a support to someone? Pause.

Jesus supports you and gives you strength to support others in their times of pain and sorrow.

HYMN O Sacred Head Now Wounded #351 vs 4,5

5) Simon Cyrene is forced to carry the cross.

Mark 15:21 They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.

Simon's help provided Jesus a moment of rest and a chance to regain his strength before the Roman soldiers return the cross to Jesus. A small Franciscan chapel commemorates the devotion of Simon of Cyrene.

Even Jesus had help in carrying the burden of his cross.

Will you accept help?

Who has been there to support you?

Who needs your strength and support? Pause.

Jesus brings people into our lives at unexpected times to help us on our way.

6) Veronica wipes the sweat from Jesus' face.

Luke 23:27 And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.

At a small Greek Catholic chapel named "The Holy Face" a medieval legend is remembered. It viewed a specific piece of cloth, known as the Veil of Veronica, as having been supernaturally imprinted with Jesus' image, by physical contact with his face.

When have you seen the face of Jesus in a neighbor?

When has someone shown you Jesus love by their compassion? Pause.

Though this legend is not biblical it reminds us that the compassion Jesus showed can be returned to him by our compassion for those in need.

HYMN #359 Where Charity and Love Prevail.

7) Jesus falls a second time as he passes through the Gate of Judgment.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

According to the tradition this marks the place where Jesus passed through a gate in the city wall. Inside the Franciscan Chapel is a Roman column on which tradition says that

Jesus' death notice was posted, so it became known as **Judgment Gate.**

The road is paved but the stones are uneven. Here, tripping and falling is a hazard for all, but especially when we are exhausted or in pain or our thoughts are elsewhere.

Consider the “stones” in your life that might “trip” you up in your faith journey.

What sin or guilt gets in the way of your relationship with God? *Pause.*

Even from the cross, Jesus offered forgiveness. By grace, your sins are forgiven.

8) Jesus consoles the women of Jerusalem.

Luke 23:27-28 *A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. ²⁸ But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for ourselves and for your children.”*

The site is marked with a simple cross on the wall of a Greek monastery. The markings in Latin mean “Jesus Christ Conquers.” **Pilgrims have to turn around at this point** and retrace their steps because the original route has been walled in since the middle ages.

Here again is compassion. Women and children run out to thank him and grieve his impending death. They will miss his presence but they will remember him.

How are you called to serve and support others, through the church and through your life? *Pause.*

Following his death and resurrection, Jesus will send the Holy Spirit, which will continue his work through his people, like you.

HYMN #349 Ah Holy Jesus

9) Jesus falls a third time.

Psalm 43:24 b *But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities*

Tradition has it that Jesus collapsed a third time, within sight of the place for his crucifixion.

His fall is marked on a Roman column between the Coptic Patriarchate (on right) and the entrance to the Abyssinian Monastery (on left). The station is next to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher

For many, this final fall would have been the end.

Yet, God gives Jesus the strength to finish his journey.

How has Jesus supported you when you were down? Where do you need His strength to complete what you are called to do? *Pause.*

No matter where life leads, Jesus accompanies us to our final destination giving us strength and courage

10) Jesus is stripped of his garments on Golgotha. ..

John 19: 23-25a *When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see*

who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” And that is what the soldiers did.

This spot would have once been the bottom of a quarry. Here Jesus was stripped and put on display. It was an act of humiliation. Yet even the sight of Golgotha, the hill on which he would be crucified, did not stop him.

Next to the entrance of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, there are stairs that lead to the outside entrance of the small Church of the Franks chapel marking the stripping of Jesus’ garments. It has a huge window. Through it you can see Mt. Mariah where Abraham offered to sacrifice his son Isaac.

*Jesus was left defenseless. Stripped away of everything, he has nothing left to give...but his life, which he gave willingly for you. **It has been said that we too stand naked before God. You cannot hide who you are. What does God see in you? Pause.***

Jesus clothes us with his own righteousness.

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher is one of the most holy sites in the Christian world, the site of the burial place of Jesus. The last 5 stations are within the Church of the Holy Sepulcher

The church was first established in 333 by the Roman emperor Constantine, after his mother, Queen Helena, marked the place of Golgotha during her visit in 326AD. The site was selected based on memories of the site as an

execution place, and on the existence of a garden, tombs and fragments of wood planks. It has been destroyed and rebuilt many times.

Currently, it is controlled by different Christian denominations within the church, each having a part of it: Catholics, Armenian, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Coptic and Ethiopian. The Muslim families have had the key to the main door since 1187. A Christian family keeps the ladder needed to reach the lock. Both are needed to open the church.

HYMN 350 They Crucified My Lord

11) Jesus is nailed to the cross.

***Luke 23:33** When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.*

This part of the church is located over the hill of Golgotha at Calvary. The main Latin shrine, wonderfully redecorated with mosaics in 1938, marks the place where Jesus was nailed to the Cross, within sight of His mother and Mary Magdalene

Tradition and archeology indicate that here Jesus is in a stone quarry. The cutting of rock and removing rock left the hillside looking like a skull. How fitting. Jesus is crucified on the left over stone.

Remember the Bible passage “the stone which the builders rejected becomes the corner stone.”

*Open your own hands and look at them as you consider that Jesus was nailed to the cross. **What does his death mean to***

you? How would you explain the crucifixion to a non-Christian? Pause.

Through death we have been given life. When there is guilt there is forgiveness. There is always a way forward.

12) Jesus dies on the cross.

Matthew 27:45, 46, 50 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ⁴⁶ And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

Inside the Church of Holy Sepulcher, the station is marked by a Greek Orthodox crucifixion altar which sits over the rock of Calvary. There is an altar at the spot where the cross is believed to have stood and underneath the altar is a silver disk with a central hole. Pilgrims can reach in and touch the spot. There is also a bit of bedrock shown with a crack said to be caused by the earthquake when Jesus died on the cross.

When have you felt abandoned by family? By friends? By God?

How have you felt Christ's presence in times of isolation or loneliness. Pause.

Jesus promises, "And surely Lo, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Luke 28:20)

HYMN #350 They Crucified My Lord

13) Jesus is taken down from the cross.

Luke 23: 50-53a Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, ⁵¹ 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. ⁵² This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁵³ Then he took it down.

Jesus died, and his body was taken down from the cross and placed in the hands of his mother. The Thirteenth Station is commemorated inside the church of The Holy Sepulchre at the Latin altar of "Our Lady of Sorrows".

Here we also see the Stone of Anointment where they laid Jesus after his death.

Jesus is truly dead and he is loved even in death.

Where do you find hope and comfort when you grieve the death of a loved one? Pause.

Remember the words spoken at most funerals. *If you die a death like his you will most certainly experience a resurrection like his.* Here is your hope.

14) Jesus is laid in the Tomb.

John 19: 39 (Joseph of Arimathea) was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with the Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

The site of Jesus' burial and resurrection is housed in its own chapel, inside a rectangular structure much like a mausoleum, which is located in the center of the Rotunda.

The first chamber is called the Chapel of the Angel.

The inner chambers, which house the tomb, and other holy artifacts were closed to the public when we visited.

The huge stone over the tomb is the final sign of the permanence of death.

When have you stood at the graveside of a loved one or watched as ashes are scattered? What hymns, bits of scripture or images brought you comfort? *Pause.*

Silence

STREPITUS: A loud noise signifying an earthquake, tearing of the temple curtain and the closing of the tomb.

Silence