



PRAYING
THE STATIONS
OF THE CROSS

MEDITATIONS ON EGINO WEINERT'S
STATIONS OF THE CROSS

STORIES FROM ST. PAUL LOCAL ASSISTANCE MINISTRY
AND GRANT AVENUE STREET REACH

ST. PAUL COMMUNITY OF FAITH

LENT, 2008

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THE WAY OF THE CROSS

Stories from St. Paul Local Assistance Ministry and Grant Street Reach

Martin Luther tells us that God can only be found in suffering and the cross. What does the event of the cross do to those of us who have been brought into that Christ event? How does the cross change us? What do we, who have been formed by the cross, DO in the world? For Luther, the cross is not about what we think, but about what we do. This is Martin Luther's question in his Heidelberg Disputation, where sets forth his theology of the cross, or rather, his ideas on what it means for the Christian to live all of life under the cross.

This devotional resource for Lent explores what the cross means for us, today, at St. Paul Lutheran, a block from the Capitol, in Denver, Colorado. How do we live our lives differently because they are lived under the cross? How does the passion—the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—change what we DO in our lives?

For Luther it is all about where we place our trust—in God's mercy, or in our own works? Meditating on Christ's passion, death and resurrection with the Stations of the Cross, we are confronted with this because the cross shows us the way things are: *Thesis 20: That person deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God through suffering and the cross.*

The cross is like a mirror; as we gaze at Christ on the cross, our gaze is turned back on us and on our world. It is my intent that these devotional meditations on Eginio Weinert's Stations of the Cross which hang in our nave will help us see our world in the reflection of the cross, our world as revealed to us through the lives of those who come to St. Paul for help—the least, the lost and the lowly who come for a spaghetti supper on Mondays at Grant Avenue Street Reach and who knock on our door seeking emergency assistance from our Local Assistance Ministry. Where does the reflection from the cross reveal God in the world?

The cross simply helps us see the way things are. As Luther puts it, *Thesis 21: A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what is actually is.*

What do meditations on the suffering of Christ in the Stations of the Cross reveal about God? Where do we see God in the suffering in our world? We are crucified with Christ on the cross—our old selves put to death by God on the cross. What does it mean to follow Jesus on the Way of the Cross?

The theologian of the cross sees the way things are. How are things in our world?—these meditations are an attempt to see the way things are through the stories of those who come to St. Paul for a hot meal on Mondays and for financial assistance on Tuesdays and Thursdays at our Local Assistance Ministry.

—Jan Miller, Lent, 2008

15 THE RESURRECTION— JESUS RISES FROM THE DEAD.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed! Alleluia! Jesus emerges from the tomb. The women with jars of herbs and ointments watch; the Roman soldiers kneel, shielding their eyes from the brightness of Jesus' glory. The tomb is filled with water, which drips down the sides of this tomb-become-baptismal vessel, the fount of all life.

Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him "Rabboni!" (Jn 20.16)

As we see Jesus rising from death, we are tempted to think that resurrection might be in the checks we write for a night in a motel for someone who is homeless.

But it's not that simple. . . . The second time Lorene came asking for help, her story began to unravel. You see, she had told us she was traveling to Texas and her money was stolen out of her purse, and then the friend she was staying with drove her to the bus depot and left her there with no money, no ticket. Now, two weeks later, she still had no money for the bus ticket, but could we help her with a night in a motel? What had she been doing for the past two weeks? Well, she replied, staying with people she met and trying to call Texas to wire her some money. She had no job to go back to, her family would not help her, and she didn't really even have a home in Texas. I began to wonder. . . . Was her money stolen, or did she spend it on cocaine? Did she really need a night in the motel or was the desk clerk taking the money for drugs? Where was the truth in her tales of theft and people who left her at the bus station?

The truth is she needed a safe place to stay and we had money to give her what she needed. And our Lord and Savior told us a story about a traveler who was beaten and robbed on his way to Jericho—and a man came along, saw his suffering, and paid for several nights in a motel. The Samaritan didn't ask whether the man had a job, or why he was foolish enough to be walking that dangerous road all by himself anyway. The Samaritan did not ask for the truth.

I don't know if there will be new life for Lorene, conjured up out of the \$20 we paid for her motel. But there is new life for us, freed from worrying about the truth. We know where our truth lies—in the One who steps out of the tomb of the dead.

Our new life, our Resurrection, is in the people we are becoming as we hear the stories that break our hearts. Our new life comes to us as we question our middle class lifestyle that seems suddenly wasteful when we listen to those who have nothing, as we question the wisdom of forcing people into a consumer-driven "productive" way of life, as we hear the stories of how our social systems push the most needy people to the margins, abandon them and render them invisible. We receive new life in a commandment. . . that we love our neighbor, the one homeless on the road to Jericho.

O God, we adore you and we bless you. Hold our hands as we step out of the watery tomb of the old self, drowned and made new in the baptismal waters, to follow in your way of new life—freely offering all we have been given to those who are in any need. We pray today for. . . .

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

In the centuries after Christ's death and resurrection, Christians came to Jerusalem from all over the world to walk the streets and touch the earth where he preached, healed the sick, suffered, died and rose from the dead. Diaries and other records give testimony to the visits by faithful pilgrims who came to walk where they believed Jesus had walked and remember the story of his passion and death. In the fourth century, Emperor Constantine's mother Helena was one of the people who sought out the sites where the Christians believed Jesus had lived and taught. She built extravagant churches throughout the Holy Land—in Bethlehem, and on the Mount of the Ascension in Jerusalem. St. Jerome, in the fourth century, writes about the many pilgrims who came to Jerusalem to visit the holy sites. As early as the fifth century, installations were being constructed in churches and in towns and villages throughout Europe.

In 1342 the Franciscan order was given custody of the religious sites in the Holy Land and they formalized the stations on the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem. Plaques mark the stations and the artwork on the walls and windows of nearby cathedrals and churches encourages the faithful to ponder the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As travel became more dangerous and difficult in the Middle Ages, Stations of the Cross were constructed in churches and towns across Europe, so that pilgrims could ponder Christ's passion without leaving home.

Use these meditations at home for your Lenten devotions or use them at St. Paul as you walk our Stations of the Cross by Eginio Weinert, which hang on the walls of our nave. Walk the Stations on Good Friday following the liturgies, or following our weekday liturgies. Or use them on one of our quarterly Days of Reflection (days of silence) at the church.

OPENING WORDS

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

By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

These are traditional words for meditating on the Stations of the Cross. They are also used responsively on Good Friday during the Procession of the Cross.

PSALM TEXTS are taken from Psalm 22, traditionally used during Lent because its cries of agony, confession of faith, lament and prayers of confidence that God is truly listening help us meditate on Christ's passion and death. The Psalm calls upon faith in the promises of God, who has proven faithful to Israel. The stories of the Passion in the New Testament refer back to this Psalm—for example, the allusion to verse 8 in the jeers of the crowd in Matthew 27.42-43: "He trusts in God, let God deliver him now." In the gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus says the opening words of this psalm as he is dying on the cross: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

CLOSING VERSES for each Station are from the hymn "Jesus, in Thy Dying Woes," Lutheran Book of Worship #112. Feel free to borrow a green LBW from the pews if you want to use this hymn for meditation at home during Lent.

1 JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

The crowds crying out for Jesus' crucifixion charge Jesus with "perverting our nation...he stirs up the people" (Lk 23.2, 5). So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves" (Matt. 27.24) He handed him over to them to be crucified (Jn. 19.16).

Psalm 22:1-2

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me,
from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Even though all four Gospel writers are agreed that Pilate sees no reason for sentencing Jesus to death, Pilate gives in to the demands of the crowds, who are adamant that Jesus be crucified. The mob mentality rules, and Pilate, with the power of the Roman legions behind him, claims powerlessness and washes his hands.

More than ten years ago I went to the State Capitol to support a bill that would increase the monthly stipend for Aid to the Needy Disabled in Colorado. We were asking for an increase of a few dollars to raise the monthly stipend to \$219. I remember one of the speakers telling the legislators that the only shelter one could find in Denver for less than \$219 was a storage unit—cement floor, no windows, no heat. Colorado's AND program is the safety net for the poorest of the poor—those who are disabled, but not eligible for Federal assistance, or waiting for Federal approval—the ones who have no other place to turn.

One Tuesday at Local Assistance, Roberta came into the room, walking gingerly, easing herself slowly into the chair. She spoke in an almost-whisper: she needed \$100 for her rent. She had been working as a landscaper, when she felt numbness in her thighs and a searing pain in her back, a sharp pain that shot down her right leg, immobilizing her. Her sciatic pain made it impossible to work, even though she tried massive amounts of Tylenol. A couple of years ago when I had sciatic pain, my doctor sent me for an MRI, injected my spine with cortisone and I was pain-free in a few days. Roberta, however, out of work, has no insurance and, although Stout Street Clinic has referred her for an MRI, she cannot have the procedure without insurance.

She had applied for SSI income for her disability and for state funds from the Aid to the Needy Dependent (AND). Today the AND program pays \$230 a month. She was renting a room in a house for \$250, so her AND payment would not even cover her rent. Because she was the third person we had seen, we were low on money and were able to give her only \$30, but she said with genuine gratitude, "Any little bit helps."

Do we, voters and holders of power in this democracy, wash our hands of those unfortunate enough to become ill, and lose jobs and insurance?

*Jesus in thy dying woes, Even while thy lifeblood flows,
Craving pardon for thy foes: Hear us, holy Jesus.*

O God, you knew pain on the cross. Inspire us to use our power to heal those we meet today who are in any pain or need. We pray today for.....

14 JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

[Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus] came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. (Jn. 19.38-42)

They carry Jesus—Simon, Joseph, Mary and a young girl, carry him away from the hill where he was crucified. Both Nicodemus and Joseph were secretly disciples. Nicodemus had come secretly to Jesus in the night to hear his teachings. This work, burying Jesus, they also did in the dark of night, treating the body according to the Jewish burial rituals.

Psalm 22:30-31

Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Clutching her eviction notice, Shirley had brought her tattered red plaid umbrella and come early, even though it was raining, so she could get a good place in the line that forms outside our door before 1:00. You see, if you are not here early, you won't be seen by the counselor—too many people to see and not enough money. So they start lining up on the sidewalk by the north door on Grant Street at least an hour early, no matter if it is raining, or snowing or sweltering heat. Shirley came in with the group—she had been the third one in line and today she was sure they would have time to see her and she might receive some rental assistance.

Once inside, she got an egg salad sandwich and a piece of cake and sat at the tables with the others. They began to share their tales of woe. The homeless man had just been released from the hospital and needed a couple of nights in a motel to heal from his surgery. An elderly woman in a brown sweater brought one of her grandchildren, the one who was still too young for school. The boy was unhappy and fussing—none of the food tasted good; his flushed cheeks might have meant that he had a fever. Her daughter, a crack addict, had brought the three children to her one day and had never returned for them; and now the rent was due and she had spent too much of her meager disability check on food for the little ones.

The counselor called Shirley's name. She looked at the woman in the brown sweater and the whimpering grandson and said, "See her first; she needs the help more than I do. I can come back on Thursday."

*May thy life and death supply Grace to live and grace to die.
Grace to reach the home on high: Hear us, holy Jesus.*

O God, you gave up your life for ours. Give us strength to nourish and sustain the lives of those neighbors you have entrusted to us. We pray today for.....

13 JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS AND IS GIVEN TO HIS MOTHER

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. (Jn. 19.25b-27)

In this Station, Joseph holds the linen to wrap Jesus in. Mary holds her dead son on her lap. Mary was a faithful disciple until the end. When the angel came to announce that she would bear a son Jesus, she had welcomed the opportunity to carry the son of the Most High God for the world, and now, faithful to the end, she once again bares her son's body.

Psalm 22:29

To him, indeed,
shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Mothers.....the ones we rely on when everything and everyone else fails us. Mary appears in most of these Stations, remaining faithful to the very end, standing vigil even beneath the horror of the cross as her son submitted himself to a tortuous and painful death. How hard it must be to watch your children suffer.

Linda has just been released from the hospital. She is still coughing, recovering from a severe lung infection, which kept her hospitalized for two weeks. Clinging to her knees is Megan, her very sick 3-year-old. Linda and her daughter are stranded, alone, out of money and living on the streets and both feeling rotten. The flu is no fun, but when you have no bed to rest in, it is even worse. Megan's cheeks are flushed and she whines and only wants to be held. Even with the restraining order, which she pulls out of her backpack and shows us, Linda is still being stalked by her abusive husband, never sure where he will turn up unexpectedly to demand that they return home. "Don't know why he wants me back—I can never do anything right for him. I can't ever go anywhere, but he goes out drinking with his buddies on payday and comes home in a rage." She wants to take the bus back to Tucson so her mother can help with the care of her child. Local Assistance was able to pay the \$140 bus ticket for her and her child to get home—to safety and a warm place to sleep, and a shoulder to cry on.

*Though no Father seem to hear, Though no light our spirits cheer,
May we know that God is near: Hear us, holy Jesus.*

O God, you are near to us; you comfort us in our loneliness and fear. Help us offer mothering comfort to those who need a shoulder for their tears. We pray today for.....

2 JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS

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 called Golgotha. (Jn 19.16b-17)

Psalm 22:3-5

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.
In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.
To you they cried, and were saved;
in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Often we feel like we carry our burdens all by ourselves. In this Station, the women stand in the distance and look on as Jesus is given the cross. They are not able to step in to help, but they do not abandon him. From ancient times, God has promised not to abandon us; time after time God has proven faithful—in the hostile desert, at the empty mountaintop altar of sacrifice, even in the belly of the fish and under the Roman occupation.

"God is Good," he said, "God is very good." Art, 57, needed some help with his rent. He was staying at the New Genesis Shelter, where working men pay \$45 a week for a bed—a hundred or so beds in a large room in the basement of Central Presbyterian Church. The shelter is open from 6 pm until 6 am; they get a hot meal in the evening and breakfast in the morning. In between the men shower, do their laundry, worry about keeping their jobs, hang out and talk, and occasionally fight. No privacy; no assurance that one of them won't come in drunk and wake everybody up (even though they are not permitted inside if they are drunk); no guarantee that their stuff won't get stolen.

Art had recently been in the hospital with pneumonia and was still on oxygen. He was tired and his leg hurt. He had been working as a custodian and sleeping at Senior Support Services. He had to leave when he got pneumonia, however, because he couldn't sleep on the floor. The caseworker had helped him apply for the Colorado Indigent Care Program, so his hospitalization was covered. But now he needed money for his weekly rent at New Genesis Shelter for Working Men. He grew up in Denver, but his family had moved away, so he has been on his own to find the care he needed.

The leg pain began years ago when he was bitten by a dog and the wound became infected. He lost much of the muscle, the ligaments, the tendons, but they were able to save the leg. He was told he would never walk, but he proved them wrong. "God looks out for me," he said.

*Brighten all our heav'ward way with an ever holier ray
Till we pass to perfect day: Hear us, holy Jesus.*

O God, you are indeed good, and your love and mercy never fail us. Help us to embody your love in our hurting world. We pray today for.....

3 JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

Two women look on, both looking distraught; one is Jesus' mother.

Psalm 22:6-8

But I am a worm, and not human;
scorned by others, and despised by the people.
All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me,
they shake their heads;
“Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

For the most part our lives seem pretty secure—we have a good education, work hard. We're smart and plan ahead. We buy health insurance for ourselves, life insurance for those who depend on us, disability insurance just in case we cannot work because of illness. Then the company we work for outsources our job to India or moves to Texas. We don't want to move because we have a house, our children are in school, our family is here—and we don't even like Texas! That's OK for a few weeks because we have some money in the bank for just such emergencies.

That's what happened to Irene. She was making \$60,000 a year and her house payments were \$2000 a month. It had been hard after her husband left her, but she had managed to keep her house so that her children could keep going to the same school with all their friends; so much had been disrupted in their lives and she was glad to have been able to at least keep the house. But when she lost her job, suddenly \$2000 became impossible. Her \$10,000 savings quickly disappeared—in school supplies, soccer uniforms, groceries, and visits to the pediatrician—over the months while she looked for another job. Because she could not take just any job, but needed to find something that would enable her to pay the mortgage. McDonald's was out; a retail job at Target could not pay enough to cover her mortgage. Her sister suggested that she sell the house, but she kept hoping that she could hold it all together.

It's so easy to fall. Gravity does all the work. Falling requires no effort on our part, just giving in to the pull of the forces that control our lives. Falling usually begins with a small stumble, some tiny thing, unforeseen, unexpected, sometimes something as small as the quarter-inch bump in the pavement, barely noticeable—until we trip and fall headlong, flat on our faces. It's when they have fallen flat and cannot get up that they bring their kids for the free spaghetti supper on Mondays and come to our Local Assistance Ministry asking for help. But, while we can help with \$50-100 to help with the rent, \$2000 is totally beyond our capabilities and all we can offer is supper and a sympathetic ear and a referral to help her find some subsidized housing which will be months in coming and nowhere near the kids' friends.

*When we seem in vain to pray and our hope seems far away,
In the darkness be our stay: Hear us, holy Jesus.*

O God, you know stumbling and falling under the weight of heavy burdens. Give us the will and the strength to help lift up the fallen who ask for our help. We pray today for....

12 JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

Then Jesus, drying with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” Having said this he breathed his last. (Luke 23.46)

Three women in the distance; Mary stands next to Jesus, praying. Another man stands on Jesus' other side—John perhaps. A soldier kneels in the background, holding Jesus' robe and a die. Blood spurts from Jesus' side and drips from the wounds on his hands and feet, where the nails have been driven through his flesh, drops on the ground.

Psalm 22:27-28

All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
For dominion belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

There is no way to make death pretty. Jesus' death is messy—thorns pierce his brow, blood runs down his face, mixed with the sweat from the physical exertion of his walk up the hill of Golgotha carrying his heavy cross. His clothing is dirty, ragged and torn. Then the soldiers pierce his side and blood spurts out and runs down his legs. It falls in drops on the ground. All this is captured in Egino Weinert's twelfth Station.

The suffering of poverty is not pretty either. Some of the people who come to the spaghetti meal on Mondays have spent many years living on the streets—under the bridges along the Cherry Creek, or in tents along the South Platte, next to the railroad tracks where the locomotives spew out soot. They do not have any place to shower and some would not think of it if they had; there are more important things to think about, like where to get another meal on Tuesday.

Poverty is not pretty and it does not smell good—it smells like body odor, stale breath and sometimes stale beer. It smells earthy, like mud. The black grime of poverty gets embedded under the yellowed, cracked and chipped fingernails. It looks like dirt and grease embedded in a backpack, the pocket worn through, and a sleeping pad rolled up under the bungee cord, its plastic cover torn. It looks like hands that were last washed I-can't-remember-when. It looks like greasy hair, matted and wild, like John the Baptist. Poverty sounds like the confused babble of the man who shouts about the generally wretched state of the world, which has been especially cruel to him. It sounds like two men fighting over an insult two weeks old. Poverty is painful, like the broken arm from a fistfight and aching toes eventually lost to frostbite.

*Though no Father seem to hear, Though no light our spirits cheer,
May we know that God is near: Hear us, holy Jesus.*

O God, you watch over us; when we pay attention, we can feel you near. Help us be reminders of your love and care for those who are too tired and discouraged, too busy just surviving, to notice that you are there. We pray today for....

11 JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

A worker nails Jesus to the cross. The dice are lying on the ground. Three men look on—looking sad? Even the soldier looks sad and tired, with bags under his eyes.

Psalm 22:25-26

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord.
May your hearts live forever!

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

“The poor shall eat and be satisfied.” This is the psalmist’s vision of the reign of God, the realm which is to come when God reigns and all evil is overcome. It is what God has desired for the world ever since the creation: “God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.’ . . . God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:29; 31)

No matter how disheveled or hopeless, everyone who comes for spaghetti can eat and be satisfied. And then, after eating, they can pick up some canned goods, bread and desserts to take home—even egg salad or tuna sandwiches—as many as they can carry. No one needs to go hungry on a Monday in Denver.

They line up along the wall at the side of our community room—on a busy day the line even snakes out the door and onto the sidewalk outside, and perhaps even around the corner. They come with their backpacks, shopping carts or black plastic trash bags full of all their worldly belongings. They know that here they can get a hot meal—all they can eat—a nutritious meal, of meat, pasta, vegetables, salad, bread, fruit and dessert. All served, not on paper plates and Styrofoam cups, but on real dishes with real cups of juice, milk or water and mugs of hot coffee.

Some come to meet up with friends. Brian helps Jody, who comes with her guide dog. Brian gets her meal and then goes to find something for the dog, who naps while she eats. Everyone loves to stop and pet the dog.

Jesus, who knows the pain of nails in his flesh, knows what some of these people have suffered—arrest and imprisonment, humiliation by the powerful, the contempt of the crowds, the judgment of their peers, torture by the officers of the law. Our God, in Jesus Christ, has endured the pain of the prisoner, the wounds of hatred and violence.

*Jesus, whelmed in fears unknown, With our evil left alone,
While no light from heav’n is shown: Hear us, holy Jesus.*

O God, you provide for us from your good creation. As we thank you for our daily bread, help us remember to share your bounty with those who are hungry this day. We pray today for. . . .

4 JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER

Two women and a soldier look on, while Mary, in a prayerful pose, speaks to Jesus. Consoling words? How hard it is to watch your children suffer.

Psalm 22:9-11

Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.
On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me
you have been my God.
Do not be far from me, for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Miguel came to Street Reach at the end of the day, while we were cleaning up, after they had finished serving food. His friend went out to the kitchen and got them both some “to go” containers of food and Miguel asked to talk to me. He told me his mother had died the day before and he needed money to go to Colorado Springs, where he works at the Econo Lodge, so he can get his stuff, including a paycheck, and go to Tucson for the funeral. His mother was young, in her 50s; and she died after being mauled by a dog. Very unexpected. He had lots of regrets. He told me he didn’t know how to go on without her, without her support. She was always there for him, even when she had to cope with his father’s abusive behavior in years past, when his father was drinking. Miguel also has a drinking problem, but he has been sober now for a year and a half. He cried; there were so many things he wanted to tell his mother, and now he could not.

As a mother, one of the hardest things is watching your children suffer. Whether the child is small or adult, whether the suffering is self-inflicted or the result of others’ cruelty, we want our children to be happy. Jesus’ mother was part of the group of his close friends—among them the beloved disciple and the women from Galilee who had followed him—who did not abandon him after he was arrested, but accompanied him, looking on from a distance or standing at the foot of the cross. If we look carefully, these witnesses are standing about somewhere ??? in all the Stations of the Cross. How hard it must have been for Mary to watch Jesus suffer. And Miguel’s mother undoubtedly had spent many anguished nights worrying about him, his alcoholism. But she was always there for him, ready to listen, waiting and probably praying for his well-being.

And, for those of us lucky enough to still have our mothers with us, it is hard for us to imagine life without our mothers, without that love that never quite gives up on us, no matter how far we stray or how much we struggle to be independent, self-sufficient.

*Jesus, loving to the end her whose heart thy sorrows rend,
And thy dearest human friend: Hear us holy Jesus.*

O God, like faithful mothers all over the world, you are always there to comfort us in our sorrows. Help us to accompany others in their sorrow. We pray today for. . . .

5 SIMON HELPS JESUS CARRY HIS CROSS

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus (Luke 23.26) They compelled a passerby, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. (Mark 15.21)

Simon helps carry the cross; a small boy walks with them, soldiers looking on. A woman prays in the background

Psalm 22:12-13

Many bulls encircle me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Stacy, tanned and sharp-looking in a cute mini-skirted sundress and white patent sandals, was looking for a bus ticket to Houston. She had gotten as far as Denver, but she did not have enough money to make the rest of her trip. She was perky and optimistic, unlike most of the people who come for help who are discouraged and worn out from long weeks of coping with illness, lack of money, hungry children. She had been told that we don't help people with transportation—it is too expensive, with our \$200-a-day limit (that is the total amount of money we can give out on any one day and it is split among the 4-5 people the counselor sees). Even though we could not help her, she was still optimistic that someone on her list of resources would be able to help her, and she spent some time sharing her resources and encouraging the others who were waiting their turns. She made sure that others who needed the list were given copies, and she called all the other people her friends.

For those of us whose crosses are not too heavy just now, maybe Simon is a model for how we follow this crucified God on the way of the cross. Maybe our Lenten discipline is helping other people carry their crosses—as we listen to a co-worker, take soup to a neighbor, visit the sick, phone our parents, sit with a drug-addicted friend, or feed the hungry. Or perhaps we can find places in the community where our help is needed to help carry others' burdens—making meals for Project Angelheart, spending the night with homeless families with the Interfaith Hospitality Network, hosting the Local Assistance Ministry one day a month, helping with the cleanup from the Monday Street Reach meal.

*May our hearts to thee incline, Looking from our cross to thine.
Cheer our souls with hope divine: Hear us, holy Jesus.*

O God, when we look through your cross we see the suffering of the world. Strengthen us so that we may follow you in your way of suffering and death and help one another bear our burdens. We pray today for.....

10 JESUS IS STRIPPED & OFFERED GALL & VINEGAR TO DRINK

...he said, "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. (Jn. 19.28-29) The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" (Luke 23.26)

Why does the scribe have his hand over his mouth? Is he beginning to regret what he has done? Jesus stands with his hands in orans position, as if he is praying.

Psalm 22:23-24

You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me
but heard when I cried to him.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

"The hardest thing is when we have to tell them we can't help them." These are probably the most often-spoken words of the counselors as they talk about their work with the Local Assistance Ministry.

Dolores came looking for \$1200 to pay this month's rent because she had lost her job three months ago and had run out of savings. She had had a good job and had paid her rent on time for fifteen years, but after three months she was despairing that she would be able to find work that would even come close to matching her previous salary.....and her rent was due again. Tom needed \$600 for his rent, but we are not able to help with such large amounts of money.

So, when these people show up to get help on Tuesdays and Thursdays they are told at the beginning that we cannot help them if their need exceeds \$250. You see, we have a maximum of \$200 to give out each day—that's \$20,000 a year—not bad for a small service program funded by individual donations by a small urban congregation, with some support (\$100-1000) from a handful of other Lutheran congregations in the metro area. But not enough to help one individual needing \$1200. The average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Denver is almost \$650. Dolores could move, but that costs money, too—security deposit, first month's rent—about \$1200 for the average one-bedroom. For Tom, moving would be more expensive than his \$600 rent. But \$600 is a lot of money when you don't have it.

"The hardest thing is when we have to tell them we can't help them. It breaks my heart."

*Jesus, in thy thirst and pain, While thy wounds thy lifeblood drain,
Thirsting more our love to gain: Hear us, holy Jesus.*

O God, the needs are so great and we are so few. Send your healing presence to those we cannot help, and help us not to lose heart. We pray today for.....

9 JESUS FALLS THE THIRD TIME

This third time Jesus' whole body falls to the ground, even his head rests on the dirt. Simon steps up to help him. Three men look on—a scribe (with his hand cupped near his face, perhaps beginning to wonder, 'what have we done?'), a man with a stick and another man. A soldier looks on with his hand raised.

Psalm 22:21-22

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.

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

By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Lynn finished serving her two-year sentence for tax fraud in February. She had tried parole six months earlier, but her salary could not cover both the \$400-a-month child support she was ordered to pay and the \$300 for the classes she was required to take to fulfill the conditions for her parole. She ended up talking her parole officer into letting her go back to prison to serve the rest of her term. She said she could have come up with the money, by selling the only thing she has, her body, on Colfax Avenue—and that would have landed her right back in jail. She didn't want to be back there again.

This was her third time in prison. This time she wanted something more for herself, but nobody is hiring ex-offenders. She has been calling the businesses on a list she was given, but it is seven years old and many of the companies have closed down. Once you've been in jail, it's hard to get started again. When she was released from prison in February, the snow was still on the ground and she spent several nights wandering the streets, looking for a safe place to sleep. Then she used up her four vouchers at the Samaritan Shelter, and the three nights in a motel provided by the Denver Rescue Mission and a night's lodging from the Denver Police Department—one week was just not enough time to get a job, save money for a deposit and first month's rent and an apartment she could afford.

She finally found a place to live, a room in a house and today she needed \$100 for her rent. We gave her \$40 and got a grant for her from Helping Hands, Helping Hearts for the remaining \$60. Odd to think that instead of coming to Local Assistance for help, she might have been a block away, walking Colfax Avenue in her black mini-skirt and yellow tank top, seeking buyers for her only possession. It's hard to pick yourself up when you have fallen several times. It gets harder each time; sometimes it seems like it's easier to just lie there.

Save us in our soul's distress; Be our help to cheer and bless,

While we grown in holiness: Hear us, holy Je

O God, our help in trouble, you know how hard it is to get back up after we have fallen. Today we remember before you all who are struggling to stand up again. May we find ways to help them manage. We pray today for.....

6 VERONICA WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. (Matt. 27:55-56)

Psalm 22:14-15

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;
my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

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

By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

The fourth century Gospel of Nicodemus records a beautiful legend from Jesus Way of the Cross. Standing by the side of the road as Jesus struggles under the heavy burden of the cross, Veronica sees Jesus' suffering and consoles him, wiping the blood and sweat from his brow with her scarf. Miraculously, the image of Jesus' face appears on the scarf.

It was a warm, sunny fall day in Denver, but dark clouds were building up over the mountains and in the afternoon, the wind started blowing. The leaves swirled around in our doorway and the wind turned cold. A couple came in, asking for some assistance. The husband had found a job and needed to get to Colorado Springs to start work in the morning. They had been living at the Samaritan Shelter for a month, while they both looked for work. Now they were smiling and their voices expressed the relief they felt at seeing a way out of their homelessness. All they needed from us were two bus tickets to take them toward financial stability.

The wind got stronger and it started to rain—well, actually snow—those sharp little drops that start out as rain but freeze on their way down and sting when they hit your face. Another man walked in wearing only a t-shirt and asked if we had any coats. Now, once in awhile we have a bag of clothing someone has dropped off for the small clothing bank at our Monday meal, but today we looked around and could find nothing, not even an abandoned sweatshirt in our lost and found.

The husband did not hesitate. He took off his nice-looking leather jacket, turned to the man and said, "Here take this; I don't need it." The man in the t-shirt said, "I couldn't take it. You're not in any better shape than I am." The other man replied, "That's OK."

Oh, may we, who mercy need, Be like thee in heart and deed,

When with wrong our spirits bleed; Hear us, holy Jesus.

O God, we thank you for the abundant gifts you daily supply. Help us to generously share what we have with those in any need. We pray today for.....

7 JESUS FALLS THE SECOND TIME

This time, when Jesus falls, his hand touches the ground. His face looks more haggard. Two soldiers look on from a distance. A man carries the nails.

Psalm 22:16-18

For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled; I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Scott had been out of prison now for three months and Michelle was determined to keep him out. She said that it was so easy to hang out with the old gang and get into trouble again, but that was not going to happen this time. She, too, had been in a bit of trouble, but never spent more than a week in jail. And she knew that it was possible to find another path—if they could keep a positive attitude. And if he could remember that staying out of jail is more important than his pride, they said, in unison.

She had enough energy and optimism for both of them, and his eyes lit up when he looked at her, his savior, his coach and source of hope. They were excited that she might be pregnant, that they might be beginning a new family, a new life together.

They both had found jobs and a cheap motel on the bus route to both their jobs. They just needed to save enough money for the weekly rental. They would both get paid on Friday, so by the end of the week they could move in. They just needed money for two more nights in a motel and for \$70 we gave them two nights in a motel near the church.

*May we in our guilt and shame, Still thy love and mercy claim,
Calling humbly on thy name: Hear us, holy Jesus.*

O God, sometime the old habits are so hard to break, but we long for the new life you offer in the resurrection. Help us to put aside our pride and give us courage to live our lives in your way of the cross and resurrection. We pray today for.....

8 JESUS CONSOLES THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, “Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.” (Luke 23.28-29)

Psalm 22:19-21

But you, O Lord, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!
Save me from the mouth of the lion!

*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.*

Her goal? To have a steady job and earn enough money to get her children back. When Terri went to prison two years ago, her children were split up. Two went to live with her mother in Pueblo and three went to live with her sister in Wyoming. Since she was released from prison in January, she has been homeless. It is hard for her to know she is not taking care of her children, that she has let them down and that others in her family must take on her responsibilities. She is paying child support when she is working, but until she finds a job, she will not be able to show that she can support them—this is what the court needs from her so that she can have her children back living with her. I wonder how her family feels—are they tired of helping her? Weary from the extra burden and the worry? How about her children? They must miss her.

Terri needs \$100 more to pay her \$300 rent this month. She is sharing an apartment with a woman she met in jail. When she was at the jail she participated in the Lutheran congregation there, New Beginnings Church at the Denver Women’s Correctional Facility. She said that church meant a great deal to her and she met some good women she could trust.

Today we don’t have enough money left to make up the \$100 difference between what she has and the amount of her rent. But the counselor calls another agency for help. If we pay \$40, the other agency can send her landlord a check for the remaining \$60. The counselor calls her landlord to make sure that will be acceptable and the landlord agrees.

*May we all thy loved ones be, All one holy family,
Loving for the love of thee: Hear us, holy Jesus.*

O God, sometimes the responsibilities of life are overwhelming. Today we remember those whose lives are in chaos. Give us the strength to care for our loved ones and for our neighbors. We pray today for.....