

- I. Ds
- II. Set Up
  - A. Welcome, intro, guests. Today we are moving through our second to last message on Luke. Some of you were not sure you'd live to see this day. It's nearly here.
- III. Intro
  - A. Today we do something a bit different. My goal is less to help you understand the events of the last hours of Christ's life as much as it is to frame up some unsettling questions so that you are appropriately unsettled.
  - B. We are going to engage Luke 23 with a devotional practice that emerged about 1,000 years ago.
  - C. This section covers what some refer to as The Stations of the cross or, the *Via Dolorosa*, *Via Crucis* and the Way of Sorrows. Technically speaking, these terms refer to two things:
    - 1. The actual path that Jesus walked as he carried his cross. I say actual although we know that the city has been reworked many times over the last 2,000 years.
    - 2. I've made this walk best we can tell. The first time I was in Israel, I preached at a church in the old part of Jerusalem. And the pastor, a Palestinian Christian who had grown up there, lived right next to the seventh station. He used to play hide and seek all along the *Via Dolorosa*. And he took me on a tour, complete with stopping at his home and meeting his mother, who still lived there.
    - 3. The second way these terms are used is to refer to a devotional practice started by St. Francis of Assisi – back in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.
  - D. Traditionally, the Stations of the Cross referred to 14 different events that happened during the last twenty-four hours of Jesus life on the earth, but since only 8 of them could be directly linked to a passage in the Bible, in 1991, they were changed a bit.<sup>1</sup>
  - E. The goal of Walking the *Via Dolorosa* or of moving through the Stations of the Cross is two-fold:
    - 1. First, it's to be reminded that what happens to Jesus is unjust. He was innocent. But He accepts it. Even as he suffers for us, he is ministering to others. The first goal is to marvel at Jesus.
    - 2. Secondly, we want to place ourselves in the picture. We want to honestly reflect on how we would have responded. And more to the point, how we are responding even now.
  - F. In light of this, it's common to supplement the passages with artistic images. In some churches these scenes are featured in the stain glass windows. At Christ Church we have several sets of Stations that rotate from campus to campus and this year we have another set of them being painted.
    - 1. For this message, Brad and I selected a variety a variety of paintings, reliefs, wood carvings and the like to help you think about what happened.
  - G. We're going to reflect on them. Again, my goal is to make this process more devotional than informational.

- IV. Because I have preached on the first few in recent weeks, I am going to skip over those.
- A. The first Station is Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he came after the Passover meal. No one would stay awake with him. And he suffered a lot of anxiety. I argued that this was because as he prayed, He sensed that the Father was already turning his back on him.
- B. The second station was Jesus being betrayed by Judas with a kiss. Judas had cut a deal on Wed. On Thursday night, he snuck away from the Passover meal to meet the authorities in order to lead them to where Jesus was spending the night so they could capture him away from the crowds.
- C. The third station was Jesus being condemned by the Sanhedrin. Remember, Jesus didn't say much, but he did weigh in to say, "Look, I'm not just the Messiah, I am the Son of Man and you will see me in power." And after they said, "You don't mean that!" He said, "I do because, I AM." He took the holy, sacred covenant name of the God as his own.
- D. The fourth station is the denial of Jesus by Peter. We noted that both Peter and Judas denied Christ – and that makes them a lot like us. I hope that since that time you've been owning your guilt a bit more. Less rationalization and self-justification and more acceptance of our guilt.
- E. We are now caught up. We begin with the fifth station.
- V. Fifth Station: Where Jesus is Judged by Pilate.<sup>2</sup>
- A. The picture here is from Antonio Ciseri, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Swiss painter. It's called Ecco Homo – Consider the man.
- B. After the Sanhedrin got through with Jesus, they sent him to Pilate. As the highest ranking Roman in Jerusalem, Pilate had to give his permission for Jesus to be killed. Pilate did not want to. He did not see anything in Jesus' teaching that warranted death. But instead of doing the right thing, he tries to weasel his way out of things. He tries to distance himself from his decision.
1. He turns to the crowd and asks, "What shall I do with Jesus who is called Messiah?"
  2. They responded, "Crucify him!" Which was a dramatic turn from a week earlier when Jesus had paraded into the city. Back then they people thought Jesus, was coming to Jerusalem to perform his miracles and deliver them from the Romans. They expected him to be a political liberator and a military messiah.
- C. The question for us here is, in what ways are we like Pilate – trying to shirk responsibility – or like the crowds, assuming God exists to meet our expectations.
- D. So here's the question: in what ways are you like Pilate or the crowd?
- VI. Sixth Station: Jesus is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns<sup>3</sup>
- A. The painting here is by William Bouguereau – a 19<sup>th</sup> century French painter, and with this station we turn a corner. The first five stations depict the invisible aspects of Jesus' suffering—the spiritual and psychological, such as betrayal and abandonment. Now we turn to the physical suffering – the cat or nine tails and the crown of thorns.
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- B. We have a sculpture here by Ted Brown of a crown of thorns. He ???

C. And please see the book ends here. When Jesus was born, angels sang his praises and kings fell on their knees with gifts. He was the object of worship. Here, at the end of his life, it's a similar scene only in jest. Men fall on their knees and offer "royal gifts." They call him King. But it's all a joke. They laugh at his claims and spit in his face.

D. We are eager to worship the powerful, beautiful, and triumphant Jesus. We like to think about the Jesus of glory. But are we willing to identify with the weak, humiliated and broken Jesus? Are we willing to pledge our allegiance to the Jesus covered in spit and blood, wearing a crown of thorns, robed in contempt, and despised by the world?

E. We need to realize that we cannot embrace the Jesus of majesty and reject the Jesus of mockery. They are one and the same.

F. The Apostle John reports on this in Revelation 5. When he was given a vision of heaven, one of the celestial elders said to him, "Behold, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, who has conquered." But after John turned to look at this triumphant King, he says, "I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain."

G. Here's the question: are we willing to identify with the weak, humiliated and broken Jesus, given the fact that he became weak, humiliated and broken for us?

#### VII. Seventh Station is where Jesus Bears the Cross<sup>4</sup>

A. Here we have a contemporary clay relief.

B. The Romans were not fans of crucifixion because it was efficient. They liked it because it was theatrical. It was a very public humiliation. As such, it was a great warning to everyone else.

C. After whipping him, the Romans forced Jesus to start carrying his cross through the streets, where he would be jeered and taunted. For a Jew, this was not just bad because you were walking to your death. It was also horrible because Deut. 21:23 declares, "cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree." The belief was, anyone being crucified was not only being punished by Rome, but also by God. There was no lower status. The crowds didn't see a prophet of God, they saw a god-forsaken soul.

D. And here's the catch. Jesus says to us, "If you want to be with me, pick up your own cross and follow." The Apostle Peter echoed this remark in his letter. "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps."<sup>5</sup>

E. Are you following Christ? Have you picked up your cross?.

#### VIII. Eighth Station: Jesus is Helped by Simon the Cyren.<sup>6</sup>

A. It is unlikely that Simon had any intention of getting involved. We have no idea why he was called out. Some think it was because he was North African – from Cyrene (modern Libya) – which means he had darker skin. And that this was racial in some way.

B. Whatever the reason, we know that:

1. After being whipped, Jesus was too weak to carry the cross so the Romans found someone to do it. This wasn't an act of compassion on their part. They just didn't want to wait all day.

2. Jesus is walking this path alone. This random guy gets pulled out of the crowd to help. Where were the disciples?

3. Simon was changed by this. I think it's wrong to think of him as a hero. He only did what he was forced to do. But he was changed by what happened. A passage in Mark 15, linked with a few verses at the end of Romans, suggests that Simon's sons become leaders in the church of Rome, which suggests that Simon's brief interaction with Jesus changed him. This shouldn't surprise us.

a) Getting that close to Jesus at that moment was probably an amazing thing. (It is shocking to think, a few brief moments with Jesus about to die and Simon is thinking, "I want to devote my life to this guy." But that appears to be what happened to him and to the soldier who declares that Jesus was innocent.)

b) But also, serving changes us. When you bear someone else's burden, both you and they are changed. Especially if you share in their suffering.<sup>7</sup> Which is what happens in real community. The suffering are comforted, but the comfortable also suffer.

C. So, here's a question: do you take on the suffering of others, or do you chose who you hang out with based on their ability to make you feel comfortable.

#### IX. Ninth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem<sup>8</sup>

A. We're using a contemporary print of a wood cut for this.

B. And what we should note here is that we finally find some people who sense that what is happening to Jesus is wrong. They are crying out against the injustice Jesus is facing. But rather than thank them for their sensitivity, Jesus shifts the attention away from his pain and says, "Don't cry for me. What is coming your way will be worse." This is the fourth reference to the upcoming fall of Jerusalem that would happen in 70 AD. It might also have overtones of the ultimate judgment.<sup>9</sup>

C. What we see is that Jesus remains a prophet – thinking about others to the end. We often think that what prophets did was shout at others to repent. That they are angry and are giving voice to any angry God. But what they often do is weep. Jesus has already wept over Jerusalem. And that is what he does here.

D. It's also worth noting that Jesus refuses to play the victim. That status comes with power and often some privileges. But Jesus doesn't go there, and he remains more concerned with the needs of others.

E. Question Nine: Whose needs have you been focused on lately? Whose needs should you be focused on?

#### X. Station Ten: Jesus is Crucified.<sup>10</sup>

A. Luke does not dwell on the appalling and calculated cruelty inflicted on Jesus by the soldiers. We do not get many details. No talk of the blood or sweat or flies or agony. We know that he was stripped naked – one more indignity - and then nailed to the cross. We are not told exactly how it happened, nothing about what those around said or about how Jesus writhed in pain. Maybe the writers skipped this because they were writing during the Roman Empire. The people knew. They didn't need details. Maybe the writers wanted us to focus on other things.

B. There are a couple ironies here. God dies. The Son is crucified. Also, the Romans put a sign next to Jesus announcing that he was the King of the Jews. They meant it in jest but, of course, he was and is.

C. The irony of a suffering Jesus – a humiliated deity – gets more ink later. In I Cor. Paul will write that the idea of the crucifixion was too much for many.<sup>11</sup> It is foolishness. Laughable. Nietzsche, who comes long after the Romans, says the same thing. He claimed that all that matters is power. Nothing else. God nailed to a cross does not come off as power. It was crazy. From time to time the shock of this should grip us again.

#### XI. Eleventh Station: Jesus Promises His Kingdom to the Good Thief<sup>12</sup>

A. All four Gospels tell us that there were two others crucified with Jesus – one on each side. Luke calls them criminals.

1. Preachers like to set them up as a good thief and a bad thief. That is not very helpful. It suggests that one is Jean val Jean, stealing bread for his nephew, and the other was bad. It's better to think of one as repentant and the other as not.

2. Secondly, Matthew and Mark use a term that suggests that they were zealots – that is, they were part of the group trying to overthrow Rome. Today we'd call them guerillas, freedom fighters or terrorists.

B. In any event, there is a lot to see here. First of all, based on Christ's interaction with them, we see that it is never too late to turn to God. The thief who humbles himself and asks for Jesus's help is promised help.

1. "Remember me when you come into your kingdom," he asks. Which he clearly understands to be something supernatural because they are dying at the moment."

2. And Jesus says, "today you will be with me in paradise."

C. Some of you still doubt that God could possibly love you. He does. His love is greater than your sin. Frankly, your sin is not even close.

D. The other thief remains hard to the end. He mocks Jesus and rails against him. "Are you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" he demands. And he sets up a second lesson. You see there are two errors we can make. One is believing that no one can change. The other is believing that everyone will. It's never too late, but some people will cling to their anger until their final breath.

E. Question 11: Are you making either mistake?

#### XII. The Twelfth Station: Jesus Speaks to His Mother and the Disciple<sup>13</sup>

A. The painting here is by Jean Baptiste Van Eycken – a Belgian artist – also 19<sup>th</sup> century

B. Here we see Jesus instructing John to care for his Mother. The language Jesus uses here – “Behold your Mother!” – is the legal language used in first century adoptions.

1. In the first century, there was no Social Security or Medicare or Life Insurance. As the eldest Son, Jesus is responsible for Mary. Why she is not entrusted to any of her other children is not stated and seems a bit odd. But what we get is a sense that in Christ our bonds are more significant than even our biological bonds.

C. Question 12: Do you understand the call to be part of the family of God?<sup>14</sup>

### XIII. Thirteenth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross<sup>15</sup>

A. Here is a painting by Diego Velázquez, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish artist.

B. At this station, Jesus cries out “Eli, eli, lama sabachthani,” or – “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.” It would have been obvious to those watching, that Jesus was quoting from Psalm 22 – which was written by King David centuries earlier. In citing it, he was doing a few things:

1. First, given that this is Messianic Psalm, He is making a clear claim to be God.

2. Second, he is drawing people’s attention to Psalm 22 – which opens with this primal cry of pain and angst. Clearly Jesus is there. But please note, Psalm 22 ends very differently than it starts, and Jesus is quoting the whole thing. The Psalms were not numbered. People memorized them and then referred to them by the first line. “Why have you forsaken me?” captures his anguish, but it also directs people to a Psalm in which God’s faithfulness is reaffirmed.<sup>16</sup>

C. Story about drowning.

D. Question: Have you embraced the Gospel or are you fighting to earn God’s love?

E. As the story starts, band comes up, towards end of the story they start playing, “How deep the father’s love for us.”

### XIV. Song

### XV. Campus Pastors - Communion.

### XVI. One Station Remains – it’s number 14 - Jesus is Placed in the Tomb<sup>17</sup>

A. Some Christian traditions focus on Christ’s death – his suffering, his passion – with the focus being on what he has done for us. Others focus more on the resurrection. They glory in his victory over evil and death. Almost no one says much about what happened in between – his burial. But the Gospel writers do and Paul does and it also ends up in the creeds.

B. And, of course, we highlight it every time there is a baptism – being immersed in water was a symbol of death and burial. The Christian rite of baptism starts with identifying with Jesus in his death before we identify with him in his resurrection. The idea is that our old self dies and is buried.

C. The tomb is important. And it is disruptive. The idea that God could die and be buried is one of the real scandals of the Christian faith.

1. Muslims, who recognize Jesus as a prophet but not God, are unwilling even with Jesus as a prophet to suggest that he died on the cross. They claim that he was taken into heaven before he died.
  2. Buddhists say that suffering and death are mere illusions to be transcended.
  3. The Gnostics – one of the very first heresies to rise up, one that John wrote against in the New Testament – denied that Christ had a real body in part to avoid the idea that he really died.
- D. The idea that we worship a Jewish carpenter who died on a Roman cross is crazy to many. But that is the message. As scandalous as it might be. God showed up in the flesh. He came down from heaven and he died. “For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes should not perish but gain eternal life.
- E. If you’d like to talk with someone about that, or pray with something about anything, we have people up front as our service ends.

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<sup>1</sup> They were changed by Pope John Paul II

<sup>2</sup> Mark 15:1-5

<sup>3</sup> John 19:1-3

<sup>4</sup> John 19:6, 15-17

<sup>5</sup> I Peter 2:21

<sup>6</sup> Mark 15:21

<sup>7</sup> Dave Goetz writes, “The entrance into the thicker, deeper life of Christ goes directly through the suffering of others... But isolation from suffering stunts spiritual formation.”

<sup>8</sup> Luke 23:27-31

<sup>9</sup> This is the fourth time Jesus has said something like this in Luke: 13:34, 19:41 and 21:20. He is referencing the siege that took place about forty years later.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 23:33-34

<sup>11</sup> I Cor. 1:23

<sup>12</sup> Luke 23:39-43

<sup>13</sup> Jn 19:25-27

<sup>14</sup> We generally think of the cross as reconciling us to God. Which is true. But we might overlook the other reconciliation – between people – that happens. In Eph. 2 Paul speaks about the cross breaking down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles and “establishing peace.” In Matthew 5 Jesus suggests that reconciliation with each other comes before reconciliation with God. In John’s first letter he will say, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ but he hates his brother he is a liar, for the one who does not love his brother whom he sees cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

<sup>15</sup> Luke 23:44-46

<sup>16</sup> By the way, he also cries out, “It is finished.” Some think that this means that his suffering is over. That is likely true, but the Greek is better translated, “It is completed.” The task Jesus came to complete is now completed. It’s not simply over, it’s been accomplished. There is a sense in which this harkens all the way back to Genesis 2:2 where we find God that on the seventh day, God the father “finished” / “completed” his work.

<sup>17</sup> Mt. 27:57-60