

The Very Reverend Timothy E. Kimbrough  
Christ Church Cathedral  
April 22, 2011  
Good Friday (12noon)  
Propers for the same

The Stations of the Cross are an ancient private devotion thought to have been created by St. Francis of Assisi to enable every Christian, no matter how poor, to make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem—to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, during the last hours of his life. It is a powerful and emotional devotion in which you watch Jesus be condemned to die, carry his cross, stumble and fall several times; and ultimately a devotion in which you accompany him to Calvary where he is nailed to a cross and dies. Episcopalians have traditionally used this devotion, as preserved in the *Book of Occasional Services*, to mark the Fridays of Lent, and even Good Friday, as long as it does not supplant the primary Liturgy of the Day.

At the 12<sup>th</sup> Station we see Jesus die on the cross. (Traditionally, the moment of his death was acknowledged with silence and a genuflection). Listen to the words of the 12<sup>th</sup> Station and see our Savior die:

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

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold your son!” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!” And when Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, “It is finished!” And then, crying with a loud voice, he said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” And he bowed his head, and handed over his spirit.

V. Christ for us became obedient unto death:  
R. Even death on a cross.

Let us pray.

O God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; who lives and reigns now and for ever. *Amen.*<sup>1</sup>

Just two nights ago we heard God call to us through the words of Psalm 27, “Seek my face.”<sup>2</sup> In the words of the same Psalmist we replied (in quick succession), “Your

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<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Occasional Services, 2003, (The Way of the Cross), p. 70).*

<sup>2</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer, 1979, Psalm 27:11, p. 618.*

face, LORD, will I seek. Hide not your face from me..."<sup>3</sup> We may, if and when we seek the face of the LORD, look to behold his 'fair beauty'.<sup>4</sup> We may look to the brilliance of a stained glass window. We may look to the eastern sunrise. We may look into the face of our sister/neighbor/stranger. Today we are asked to look in his face as he dies. What do you see in the face of Jesus as he hangs on the cross? What do you hear him say to you? The 12<sup>th</sup> Station brings us face to face with the unimaginable—our immortal God is dying. The 12<sup>th</sup> Station puts Good Friday before us. It makes the impersonal, very personal. Good Friday makes the deepest pain of the world our pain. It makes the unimaginable betrayal our betrayal. It forces you to walk past Calvary, to linger at the foot of the cross as the Light of the world is dimmed. What do see today when you look into the face of Jesus?

Jesus doesn't speak to me that way, someone will say. See Jesus? The best I have is the Sacrament. I can't get past the silver and gold to see him on the cross. How can I look up knowing that I put him there? Why would I want to know what he is saying to me just know? Mother Church, the Liturgy itself won't let us turn away. She seeks to train our eye on his suffering. She knows that Christ will come to us on the cross, again and again, just as surely as he comes to comfort. When you come to seek his face at Calvary, you may that vision comes to haunt you. It should. But know this, it will also become the very source of your life. It will horrify you but it is the one path, the only path by which you will be lead into the heart of the tomb.

Brother Roger, founder of the latter day Taizé ecumenical monastic community, champion of those giving shelter to Jews in Europe during WWII, writes,

We have eyes for looking, and our gaze needs to linger on the face of Jesus on the cross. Some artists have managed to communicate this face of Christ to an extent that enables us to enter into the mystery simply by looking...Even without knowing how to pray we can all hold ourselves in the presence of the one who is [crucified and] risen. And in the long silences when it seems nothing is happening, we strengthen ourselves within, it is there that the best in us is built up.<sup>5</sup>

We left our artist yesterday holding a painter's pallet of red, white, and black. Before her was a canvas split in the middle with a thick, gray stroke and diagonally crossed with a bold blood-red stroke. The gray stroke had come first, splitting the canvas in two. It was clearly still a single canvas yet suddenly with two parts. The tension those two parts created was somewhat resolved by the cross-secting red stroke which one again joined the two halves. Some said that wasn't artwork. Some said it didn't mean anything. The disciples didn't understand and Jesus simply said—"Those who have eyes to see, let them see!"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer, 1979*, Psalm 27:11-12a, p. 618.

<sup>4</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer, 1979*, Psalm 27:6, p. 617.

<sup>5</sup> a reading taken from a bulletin at the Church of the Heavenly Rest, NYC (April 1, 2007) [heavenlyrest.org/comm/070401\\_Evensong.pdf](http://heavenlyrest.org/comm/070401_Evensong.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Mark 4:9.

Our journey continues though much is still hidden from view. The artist proceeds though she is not exactly sure where she's headed. With the crucifixion, the single dimensional vision of the disciples becomes dual dimensional. The pain and suffering of utter loss is no longer avoidable—neither is their complicity (if only by near apathetic bystanding).<sup>7</sup> After the crucifixion they begin to understand that the words “This is my Body—This is my Blood”<sup>8</sup> were sacrificial. Jesus was substituting himself for the Passover Lamb. The *Pascha Nostrum* “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” becomes the centerpiece of this understanding.<sup>9</sup> He who knew no sin became sin for us.<sup>10</sup> What was once divided whether relationship, whether spiritual, whether of creation, whether of God—whether on the canvas or in her mind—is now joined again through the blood of the Lamb, reunited, reconciled.

Have you ever had that feeling that something terrible was happening to someone you loved, but you didn't know who, or where, or why? Our artist stands before her canvas today feeling just that way. Gray stoke. The red has taken on a crimson hue in the midday light. She's crying. She raises her brush to paint, only to find that she can't see through the tears. No painting today.

Nothing matches this time in intensity. Nothing matches this space in its focus. Nothing matches this action through which God shows his desire for intimacy with his people. All roads are leading to Jerusalem and Jerusalem is every place, every time, and every heart.

Still there are some times you simply cannot bring yourself to paint.

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<sup>7</sup> Lamentations 1:12.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 22:19ff.

<sup>9</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer, 1979*, p. 364.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21.