

Stations of the Cross

For use during the coronavirus pandemic

Each station may begin with

We adore you O Christ and we bless you,

because by your cross you have redeemed the world

1 Jesus is condemned to die



So many in our world today are condemned, especially at this time they are condemned to isolate, to be separated from loved ones, from the community of which they are a part. Condemned to breathing difficulties, to invasive medical procedures and

even to death from a virus.

Many are condemned to putting themselves at risk, the too many to name essential workers, for the sake of others. Condemned to still work so that the country doesn't grind to a halt or so that the sick are cared for, the dying are respected.

Will we continue as a society to respect the essential workers when the virus is under control, will we acknowledge the work that they do or will we return to our old ways.

2 Jesus takes his cross

What is the cross that we each carry? How do we view the cross we carry, is it an imposition, a burden, something imposed upon us as a test? Is it an opportunity, a chance to make a difference in our own lives or the lives of those around us?



For those who are able to go to the supermarket during this time, we have to queue to get in, standing 2 metres or 6 feet behind the person in front. I went to buy some food, it took me half an hour to get through the

door into the supermarket and within 15 minutes I was at the checkout having picked up the things I required.

Is this a burden, yes because it takes me longer to do the shopping, but surely it is far bigger to show that I want to respect other people's personal space, to show that I

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understand the gravity of a virus that is deadly.

Whatever your cross is during this time, look to find new ways of being, the cross was not something Jesus wanted but it brought about our salvation.

3 Jesus falls for the first time

Shopping is a new experience at the moment, keeping that physical distance between other shoppers and staff can make things challenging. I wanted to look at items on a shelf, but another was standing in front of the shelf waiting to get to the checkout, I stood with my back against the opposite shelf and asked the other if they could move so I could get to the shelf which they did.



In other situations, I have found people not remaining as far from me as I would choose, leaving me feeling a little compromised. How do we respond to such, when they fail to remain distant from us, when they fall, when they fail in social distancing? It would be easy to get huffy and complain but we are still adjusting to how things need to be done.

We need to help others when they fall rather than shout at them, we need to help them learn that there is a new world order at the moment.

4 Jesus meets his mother

A station that can't happen at this time, Mary would not be able to attend the crucifixion of her son Jesus. She might be able to watch it online, but distancing rules and no gatherings mean she could not be physically present.

How are we meeting with others at this time? We can't gather together, we are told to socially distance from one



another but what we really need to do is remain connected to one another. Technology has exploded during our lifetimes, from those who remember the only phone being a red box at the end of the street to now being able to see and hear one another via mobiles and tablets held in our hand.

We all know people who are grieving, either because of death or physical distance, we take the opportunity to continue meeting even if we are not in the same location, but we are on the phone or internet, we can meet people where they are emotionally, spiritually and that is perhaps even more important than usual.

5 Simon helps Jesus carry his cross



Simon of Cyrene was compelled to assist Jesus, to make sure that Jesus reached the place of crucifixion, the soldiers would not have wanted to fail in their task of making sure sentence was carried out. So, they compel a bystander. A bystander who goes on

to be a figure remembered in the story 2,000 years later.

Every day on the news we hear about Simon. We hear of people working together to help neighbours who are unable to get food, of football supporters who in the stadium are fierce rivals but support together the work of the foodbank. Of rival gangs who until now have been killing each other and terrorising the community but now turn their distribution network from drugs to food.

Will the common humanity we see so much of continue for years to come? Will people who come after us say the Britons of this generation were as strong as any. Will they be impressed with how we supported one another, how we changed and showed what really matters? Or will this only be a blip and in a year the rivalries and violence have returned to our streets. Will we still be part of a story in 2,000 years.

6 Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

It is without doubt that Jesus was being physically challenged as he made his way to Calvary. He had already been beaten and abused. The sweat was mingled with blood as it ran down his face making it almost impossible to see where to put his next footstep.



Veronica takes pity on him and wipes his face clear for the moment.

We are watching so many working in our hospitals doing just the same task. They are fighting to find ways to help so many who are struggling with the next step. Helping those who are struggling to find their next breath. Veronica took the risk to step from the watching crowd and perform this task, nurses, doctors, cleaners, so many are stepping forward to wipe the face, to find another breath for the vulnerable.

We don't know what Veronica did with the cloth she used, probably washed it to try and get the blood and sweat out. Did she perform this task for lots of condemned men and women or was there something different she saw in Jesus of Nazareth? It may have made a lasting impression on Veronica, it cannot be conceived that the work being done in ICUs across the world will not leave a lasting impression.

7 Jesus falls the second time

We have rules, laws that we need to follow. Jesus was under the compulsion to make his way to Golgotha where he would be nailed to the cross and left to die. He complied because there was a bigger picture to fulfil, to complete the work that he had been sent to do, to fulfil the prophecies, to find the way of salvation.



It seems sad that government has had to legislate to make us stay home. To provide the police with additional powers to force people to stay home. But we need to have clear guidance as to what is and what isn't appropriate. Driving from Nottingham to London because bread is cheaper is for most of us obviously not appropriate. It is reported that people are still gathering for parties and BBQs and sunbathing.

As we listen to the figures of hospital deaths each evening most of us are shocked at the numbers, but they are so high it is hard to understand them at a human level. Knowing how many students received an A in their exams doesn't mean very much unless one of those students is my child or grandchild. I pray for the police in their role as they help people to realise how being out unnecessarily is a failure which needs changing.

8 Jesus speaks to the women



The world is facing a pandemic. We don't face those very often and it seems that this is a pandemic that is spreading further and wider and is more deadly than anything we have faced for a long time. What is our response.

We today speak of Good Friday. Good because one man died. It feels intuitively wrong to call it good when we remember it because a good man died, because the Son of God died, but that death opens to us the way to eternal life. The repentant thief asks Jesus to remember him, nothing more than to recall this thief receiving his just rewards. But Jesus tells him that he will be in paradise, that for him the end is not going to be this torture and physical death, but there is more.

Can we give that message as we come alongside people in their fear, their anxiety, their panic, their doubts, their grief, that there is more, there is something greater than what we see immediately in front of us? It isn't an easy message to give when people are struggling so much, the disciples fled, but we know it is Friday and Sunday is coming.

9 Jesus falls the third time



Jesus would have been struggling physically as he came near the place of his execution. Physically beaten, hungry, thirsty, poor. Little if anything would have been positive for him in these hours. A time when we think of all those who were poor, oppressed by the romans

or the religious leaders, kept in order by their betters. Jesus was now at the bottom of the food chain, despised and rejected.

We see foodbanks, councils, government, friends, neighbours, family all seeking to assist those in need as we face remaining at home. We see food being delivered by an army of volunteers to those who can't get out. We see supermarkets stepping up to the plate to provide food, to arrange deliveries, to offer priority to those key workers who are working long hours to keep us safe.

As we think about Jesus falling under the weight of the cross for the third time, what is our excuse as a society

for allowing far too many to exist in poverty, to be hungry, to be at the bottom with no hope for a future. Will we be different after this is over, will more donate to the foodbanks or better yet will foodbanks become obsolete.

10 Jesus is stripped of his garments

Those who lie in intensive care units are stripped of their garments, they wear a hospital gown, they are dressed the same as the person in the next bed and all the others. They are stripped down to their bare humanity, their personality and possessions are all taken away in that moment.



The staff will do what they can to treat them as individuals, but these are times when such luxuries are difficult to afford.

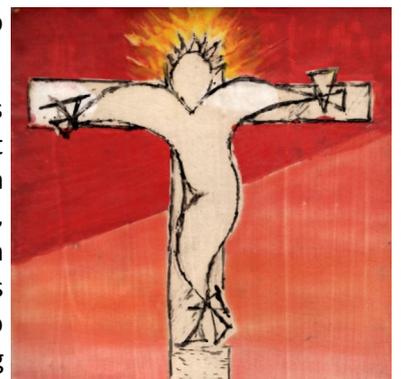
What are the garments in our life that we should discard? What matters, what things are truly important to us, or perhaps more significantly are important to God in our lives. How do we cope with the taking away of our usual activities, of our freedom to simply go outside, to meet with family and friends?

Having so little in my diary is very strange, the pressure to always be moving on to the next item, the next task, the next meeting has been removed almost completely. I don't think my diary was this empty even going back to the early days of my curacy, there were certainly more services in my diary. So much of my life is about doing. What does this situation ask of us?

11 Jesus is nailed to the cross

We cannot know how much the human instinct of Jesus was to resist the soldiers who were to nail his hands and feet to the cross. It is hard to imagine the impending torture of the cross didn't cause him to want to keep his hands close to his body rather than stretch them out. In the garden, just a few hours prior he had prayed to his Father and our Father that if possible, the cup might pass from him, but it had to be, for our sake he had to be nailed to the cross.

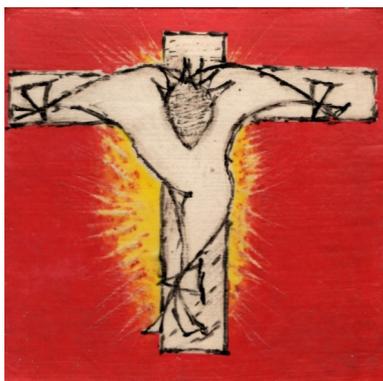
I have, over the years watched people fight against the poor health they find themselves in, watched the transition from someone who was in control of their life to someone who was being



done unto. They had to take their medication, to remain in hospital, to do what they are told.

We have moved to the status of being passive, where things are done to us, where we are severely limited as to what we are able to do. We can't go where we would wish, but have to live within the limits set by the government. Jesus tells Peter that he will be led where he would rather not go to indicate the type of death Peter was to face. We have to exist in a world where we are led, but we do so because there is no doubt it is what is required of us no matter how much we'd rather something else.

12 Jesus dies on the cross



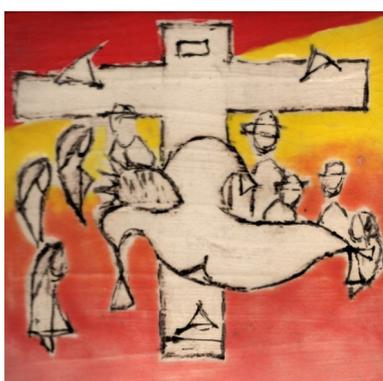
We will not face the same death as Jesus did. We will not face death by crucifixion and we have the way to eternal life open to us. I have said that I do not fear death because I have my faith in God who will welcome me home when my time comes, whether that be

today or decades in the future.

What I am less confident about is dying. I do not know how I will die, it could be swift and painless, it could be during my sleep or it could be following a long illness. What I fear if anything is the pain I may have to endure. The dying from coronavirus is not so different from Jesus' death, both are in effect a death through not being able to breath. Seeking and searching, struggling for the next breath is not a death I want to consider, but so many are facing just such a death.

My heart goes out to those who wait to hear news, hoping for good news, but for too many the news of their loved one is not good. There is the release from pain and suffering, but the parting is great. In these days the parting is even greater with the inability to watch and wait, but simply having to wait.

13 Jesus is taken down from the cross



Mary had stood at the cross and watched the final hours of her son as he hung on the cross, now having established that he is dead he is removed from the cross and placed in her arms, it must have been so reminiscent of when he was a baby and growing

child, to have him in her arms. Surrounding him with her love and care.

We have clinicalised death in normal circumstances, so many die in hospital, often surrounded by machines and apparatus, with professionals doing the bulk of the caring. We may sit at the bedside and we may be afforded the benefit of being present at the moment of death, of being able to spend some time with the body of our loved one before they are taken away.

Being present is taken away for most in these circumstances. Being able to hold our loved one's body is not possible, the situation is managed by the clinicians. Perhaps we may find as things become more stable, more normal, we might rediscover a better understanding of death in our society.

14 Jesus is laid in the tomb

Jesus does not have his own grave, rather they make use of something that is to hand. A stranger's plot is used to bury the body of Jesus. It is done hurriedly, the sabbath is upon them and things must be sorted as fast as possible to avoid the indignity of leaving dead bodies hanging around. The women will return after the sabbath has ended to do the proper rites for Jesus.

We are in the same times, except the sabbath is not simply one day of the week, we are having to wait weeks, months before we can do the proper rites for our departed. We get them buried quickly in a small, a very small, service, to simply do that which is strictly necessary at this stage. We look to something bigger later in the year, we shall return when things allow.



It is painful to watch families sit in the crematorium, scattered around the chapel to keep the social distance required. To have so few able to be present. To say little or nothing about the deceased because everyone present knows everything there is to know about them, so they see no point. To make funerals functional, but that's what happened to our Lord.