

INTRODUCTION

The word “cross” might have a negative tone for us: something painful, a burden we have to bear. But the truth is, anything we accept as the cross is healing for us. The cross turns pain into love. And love is the fullness of life.

The way of the cross was the most important moment of Jesus’ life—for him, and for us. By his way of the cross we have been healed. The First Letter of Peter tells us:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed... For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

To absorb the mystery of the healing Jesus brought to us, we divide his way of the cross into fourteen “stations,” or stopping places, where we pause to reflect on what is happening. Each one of these moments had great meaning and value for Jesus. And each heals us in a special way. We want to understand what that is so that we can open our hearts to healing, and open them more fully to Jesus himself.

For that to happen, we have to look, reflect, and absorb. And the Holy Spirit has to inspire us. That will be our prayer as we pray the way of the cross.

The First Station

HEALING FROM THE PAIN OF REJECTION

LEADER The First Station: Jesus is condemned to death.

Our true identity is identification with Christ. See Jesus judged and condemned. Be there. What thoughts, what feelings come to you? Dwell on them now and later.

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

ALL Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

LEADER Have you ever been rejected? Misunderstood? Did it make you question your value, feel worthless? Unlovable? Jesus was condemned unjustly to heal us of that.

The judgment pronounced on Jesus shows us how little human judgments matter. Jesus was God himself, the best, most loving person who ever lived. Those who judged him didn't know him. And those who judge us don't know us. The mystery of Christianity is that, in baptism, Jesus made us his own body, living by his own divine life. Those who judge us are judging him.

Now the Father sees and loves in us what he sees and loves in Christ. On the cross, Jesus made our sins his own. And annihilated them. Anything bad in us, he purifies. "Behold, I am making all things new!" We have the beauty of Jesus Christ!

Our true identity is identification with Christ. We are healed of all rejection—given and received—when we identify ourselves and others with Jesus rejected, crucified, and triumphant.



READER Hear the word of the Lord (*pause briefly between passages*):

This Jesus is “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.”

For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.

Christ redeemed us . . . by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”

All you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

[*a brief moment of silent prayer*]

ALL Lord, if we ever judge ourselves or others for anything, let us hear you saying, “If you judge the least—or worst—of your brothers or sisters, you are judging me.” Amen.

✠ **READING QUOTES:** See *Sunday Preface VII*; *Revelation 21:5*,
Galatians 2:19; *3:13*; *Colossians 1:27*; *Acts 4:11*

The Second Station

HEALING FROM THE WEIGHT OF OUR SINS

LEADER The Second Station: Jesus takes up the cross.

The weight of the cross is sin. Jesus carries ours. See Jesus accepting the cross. Be there. What thoughts, what feelings come to you? Dwell on them now and later.

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

ALL Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

LEADER The greatest cross we carry is our own sin, whose weight is guilt, shame, fear, and discouragement. Jesus heals us of all that by making our cross, our sins, his own. At baptism he took us, with all of our sins, into his body on the cross. When he died, we died with him and in him, and our sins were annihilated. Now all who are forgiven are without sin. We have been made innocent. That is the mystery of redemption.

READER Hear the word of the Lord (*pause briefly between passages*):

All we like sheep have gone astray; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.



Now Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

[a brief moment of silent prayer]

ALL Lord, if we find our sins unbearable, we can shift their weight to your shoulders. You are already carrying them. Amen.

✠ **SCRIPTURE:** 1 Peter 2:24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Matthew 11:28

The Third Station

HEALING FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF FAILURE

LEADER The Third Station: Jesus falls the first time.

A strong Christian is a weak person who relies on God. See Jesus fall under the weight of the cross. Be there. What thoughts, what feelings, come to you? Dwell on them now and later.

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

ALL Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

LEADER Failures can cause discouragement, even self-loathing. We worry about the damage we have done by our failures to be good enough at what we do—as men, women, spouses, parents, teachers, managers, workers, Christians.

Jesus, though he was God, became a human being with human weaknesses, to show us that to be weak is not to be evil. It is to be human. Jesus fell under the cross because he was too weak to carry it. He heals us of our sense of failure by showing us that even he, in his human body, could and did fail.

No fall makes us a failure if we let Jesus help us up.

READER Hear the word of the Lord (*pause briefly between passages*):

“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me... for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.



Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God... emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness... Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.

[a brief moment of silent prayer]

ALL Lord, you fell so that we might rise. Keep us rising until we are risen with you forever. Amen.