

Stations of the Cross Good Friday 2017

'Behold, I come' (Psalm 40.9)

1 Jesus is condemned to death

I am alone now, there is no-one to hold on to. No Peter, no James, no John. No friendly faces, just enemies, just hate. I never knew I needed my friends so much. With them fear could be tamed, now it storms, fills me, drowns me. I could not have imagined such fear.

Words from a psalm: In the book of the law it is written concerning me, that I should do your will. I will delight to do it; your law is within my heart. Behold, I come.

And if I am wrong? If it is all just me, not you, just my crazy thoughts, and not your law? What becomes of me then?

God, do not let me be wrong. Receive me now. Behold I come.

2 Jesus receives his Cross

God, it is heavy. Not a weight to be lifted, but to be killed by. The knees go at once. I stagger around the courtyard, the wounded beast, the clown-Messiah. Can I blame them, Peter and James and John, even Judas - who could believe in a Messiah like me? Can I even believe in me?

God, do not let me be wrong. Behold I come. I need to walk, not doubt, to walk with dignity. Father, give me strength. Behold, I come. Your will be done.

The death march begins.

3 Jesus falls for the first time

The devils in my head laugh. The joke-Messiah who thought God was with him. Memories of the wilderness pour in: if you are the Son of God, make this stone bread ... *if* you are the Son of God. Toss the tree aside, summon the angel legions, take your fiery vengeance.

And then, the deeper testing ... *if* you are the Son of God. But what can that mean here, sprawled in the dust, what can that mean, not in the death, but in this stupid mess I have become?

God, I do not know. I cannot think. Carry me through this. It is written of me, Behold I come.

4 Jesus meets Mary

Such pain. How can I look at her - see the pain, the bewilderment, the reproach? How can you do this to me, the eyes ask - eyes full of longing and need that I cannot answer? Eyes of love let down, left gasping. Father, what of her? Touch her now, save her. Take her away from this place. And still she looks, hurting, hurting, hurting. I love her so. Have mercy upon her.

5 Simon of Cyrene

How can you share a weight heavier than the world? Simon wandered too close, and suddenly he is caught. He is thinking: How can I get away, how can I escape, back to safety? I did not ask for this. And you, did you wander too close? You did not ask for the illness, for the divorce, for the death, for the failure - for all the times when you find yourself walking, unknowing, with Christ and the cross.

But that is where God is: bearing all things, enduring all things, hoping all things?

Lord Jesus, grant us to know we walk with you.

6 Veronica

Is this all goodness can do, a helpless wiping away of sweat? What good is a handkerchief before spears and nails and wood? What good, except the sad forlorn protest of humanity against itself, the hopeless instinct that this should not be.

He receives the kindness and weeps for the weakness of goodness. No-one notices. The death march staggers onwards.

7 Jesus falls for the second time

So there will be no dignified stride after a shaky start, no compelling grandeur about the way I die. Even with Simon, I'm down on the ground, scaling a mountain of effort even to focus, let alone stand, let alone walk.

Just to lie here, to lie, to fade away here on this road ... but boots kick, and hands drag, and I'm hauled onwards - no rest yet, no gentle fade away.

In the book of the law, it is written of me: Behold I come.

8 Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem

Somehow, he speaks: the teacher again, even from the depths.

"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, weep for yourselves and for your children."

Weep for a world which does this, which takes its God, its life, and kills him. When he is gone, what then? The world spins on, the shops stay open - but at its heart, there is nothing: a great, screaming absence where God should be, where the soul should be. Weep not for me, weep for yourselves and for your children, condemned to this world.

9 Jesus falls for the third time

The Judge of the world trips and lies in the dust again. The great teacher, with the immortal wounds - the great joke, the divine idiot.

I see it now, rising before me, the stark hill with the killing trees, the world's puncture point for my madness.

I do not want to die, I do not want to die. And the sky and the crowd and the soldiers and the hill and my people and my God and myself, press in, press to the point, and tell me that I have no choice, that it is settled.

I stare at the waiting trees, stare into the blackness. The altar servers haul me up. Behold, I come.

10 Jesus is stripped of his garments

Naked now, naked as the animals, mere flesh and blood, bruised, cut and shivering. Suddenly aware of how vulnerable life is, how easy it is to die. Do they know that, the crowd, these soldiers: their eyes and blades bright, their bodies hard and sleek? This will be them, this will be you: the body trembling, the mind groping in the dark, the knowing of love's let down - this will be them, all stripped down to die, to one great unknowing loss.

Father, in my death, let me save them.

11 Jesus is nailed to the Cross

The march is done now, I am on my back. The soldiers grip me, arrange the hands and feet. I sense the nail points poised at ankles and wrists, my whole body tensed, waiting for the blow to fall, the metal to pierce. I am joined to this Cross, one with it. And it was always so, long before the nails, long before today, a deeper, stronger, joining. It was always so, at the baptism, at the birth, from eternity. The law of the cross is written in my heart. And now, indeed, I come.

12 Jesus dies

I wait on the edge of eternity.

Words from a psalm: "Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but my ears you have opened. Burnt offering and sacrifice for sin you have not required, then said I: Behold, I come. In the scroll of the book it is written of me that I should do your will, O my God. I delight to do it: your law is within my heart."

Then said I, Behold I come. Behold, I come.

Father, do not let me be wrong. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

13 Jesus is taken down from the cross

All silence now, save the weeping. His friends work, numbed and shocked; work at nails and fastening, trying to handle him gently.

The crowds drift away, the soldiers back to base: nothing to see here anymore. Where once he was, there is absence: just a broken, lifeless body to be stored away. The crowds have places to go and people to see, the world spins on, leaving him behind, dead at its heart.

14 Jesus is laid in the tomb

The stone is rolled over, and there is darkness. Darkness and silence.

All there is, is darkness and silence, waiting and watching in the dead heart of the earth.

Behold, God will come.