

Stations of the Cross

The Passion of Jesus
and the
Pain of Asylum Seekers

A Good Friday Service
from Church World Service



Order of Service

Greeting
Opening Prayer
Special Music
Explanation of Stations

The 14 Stations

Closing Prayer

Closing Hymn: "Sanctuary"



Explanation of Stations

After Jesus died and rose from the dead, many people reflected upon His passion and death. Pilgrims began to visit Jerusalem and walk in Jesus' footsteps along the street where He walked, which is known as the Via Dolorosa, the way of pain. They stopped along the way and remember what had happened to Jesus.

As the years passed, the practice spread throughout the world. Many Catholic churches now have the Stations of the Cross along the walls of their churches. Pilgrims can come to church anytime, pray and move from station to station. Other churches have embraced this practice, as followers of Christ remember His death and resurrection. Traditionally, the stations are observed on Good Friday. This version remembers Christ's way of pain through the pain of today's asylum seekers imprisoned by the United States government.

Asylum is a right of last resort for people who cannot count on their own governments to protect them, and are forced to flee their homelands and seek the protection of other governments. Many asylum seekers are highly traumatized people who have survived torture and other severe abuses and for whom detention, particularly prolonged detention in jails, is particularly harmful. Migration Information Source reports that in 2002, 18,450 asylum seekers were detained in the United States. A Physicians for Human Rights' study of asylum seekers detained in New York; Newark, N.J., and Pennsylvania found that they spent an average of 10 months in detention, with the longest period being 3.5 years. (JMM)

The 14 Stations of the Cross



1. Jesus is condemned to death.

Across the world, men, women and children are forced from their homes to seek freedom from religious, political, racial, social and ethnic persecution. They are denied the right of worship, they are denied the right of dissent, and they are denied the right to live without fear. They come here seeking safety and sanctuary.

Jesus was insulted and did not retaliate with insults: when he suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly ... Through His wounds we have been healed. (1 Peter 2:23-24; See Isaiah 53:5-7)

ALL: As Jesus was unjustly condemned, so have asylum seekers in our land been condemned. Although they have committed no crime, they are looked down on and imprisoned in over more than 200 jails and detention centers throughout the United States. Set them free, O Lord, set them free.

Sung Litany: “Kum Ba Yah” (1 Verse: “Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah ...”)



2. Jesus carries His Cross.

Searching for safety and fleeing death, they have climbed mountains, stowed away on ships and paid for false documents, all in hopes of staying alive. Their homes have been destroyed, family members have been executed, there is no home left. They come here for safety. They are safe! But we have placed them behind bars with the criminals of this land. Each day, in the United States, asylum seekers are in prison - men, women and children.

Jesus' state was divine, yet He did not cling to His equality with God, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a slave, and became as human beings are. (Philippians 2:7-8)

ALL: Our sisters and brothers have come, one by one, in pairs and in groups, weighed down by a life of persecution and injustice. They have been physically, emotionally and spiritually violated. Set them free, O Lord. Set them free.

Sung Litany: "Kum Ba Yah" (1 Verse: "Families crying, Lord, kum ba yah ...")



3. Jesus falls for the first time under the weight of the Cross.

A man sits behind bars. He remembers stepping across the bodies of his mother and father, executed by the police. He remembers running for his life, for freedom. If he did not leave the country he would be killed or jailed. He remembers arriving at Kennedy Airport and being chained to a bench for three days and then being sent to prison. He remembers the sound of prison gates and he wonders, "How can this be? This is the United States, the land of the free..."

After mocking Him, they stripped Him of the robe and put his own clothes on Him. (Matthew 27:31)

ALL: Our sisters and brothers survived a brush with death, saw death consume their family and friends. They touched death but the will to survive brought them here. Set them free, O Lord. Set them free.

Sung Litany: "Kum Ba Yah" (1 Verse: "Someone's crying, Lord, kum ba yah ...")



4. Jesus meets His mother.

Behind bars a woman cries. She is a stranger in a strange land. Her tears fall. Are her children alive? There is one way to find out. She is told she must go to court yet she has no attorney and no money. In another cell, a father cries. He arrived with his wife and child. He was sent to this prison, his wife to another, and his child to a third detention center.

A great number of the people followed Jesus, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. (Luke 23:27)

ALL: As Mary watched her son's struggle continue, the families and friends of detained asylum seekers watch helplessly as their loved ones remain behind bars. Set them free, O Lord, set them free.

Sung Litany: "We Shall Overcome" (1 Verse: "We shall overcome ...")



5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry His Cross.

Pro bono attorneys pick up the cases of some of the asylum seekers. Some, but far less than all. Without legal help most will be deported to torture, persecution, imprisonment and possibly death.

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)

ALL: The burdens of asylum seekers are heavy. Their persecutions have been great. Their babies have been tortured. Their bodies have been violated. Their homes have been destroyed. Their basic human rights have been denied. The injustices have been almost impossible to bear. Set them free, O Lord, set them free.

Sung Litany: "We Shall Overcome" (1 Verse: "We'll walk hand in hand ...")



6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.

Around the country, people are gathering and organizing to offer support to detained asylum seekers and to sound a public cry for their freedom. We stand together and with all asylum seekers and pray for the day they will no longer be held behind bars.

Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, blessed are the wombs that never bore... (Luke 23:29)

ALL: Each life is precious. The asylum seekers are defenseless. Their pain is our pain. We remember the refugee Christ, who fled political persecution with his parents. The asylum seekers behind the bars of the prisons here are persecuted as He was. We would gladly wipe their faces, catch their tears, and welcome them in our communities. Set them free, O Lord, set them free...

Sung Litany: "We Shall Overcome" (1 Verse: "We shall all be free ...")



7. Jesus falls for the second time.

A woman is in a prison in Queens, New York. Her attorney is in York, Pennsylvania, and has filed an appeal. She has been in prison for two years and five months. She has committed no crime, she only seeks asylum. The Department of Homeland Security is planning to deport her without informing her attorney.

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice... (Isaiah 10:1-2a)

ALL: Each time another injustice takes place, the detainees sink further into despair. Freedom moves farther away. In their homelands, they were persecuted and imprisoned. In the United States, they are denied the promised freedom that America symbolizes. Iron bars hold them captive. Set them free, O Lord, set them free.

Sung Litany: "We Shall Overcome" (1 Verse: "They will all be freed ...")



8. Jesus consoles the women of Jerusalem who weep for him.

In one prison a mother cries. In another, a child cries. The child does not speak English. She was taken away from her mother at the airport. "Mama, mama," she cries. "Where are you? Where are you? Where are you? Why are these doors always locked? Mama where are you?"

And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when He had taken him in His arms, He said unto them, "Whosoever shall receive one of these children in My name, receives Me: and whosoever shall receive Me, receives not Me, but Him who sent Me. (Mark 9:36-37)

ALL: Broken dreams. Freedom was so near. And now, mother and daughter separated in two prisons, miles apart. The husband and father was killed by the military. The mother was raped, but is alive and lives for her child. They come into safety and separation. Set them free, O Lord, set them free.

Sung Litany: “Sleep My Child (All Through the Night)”



9. Jesus falls for the third time.

A young man is granted asylum. For a brief moment he imagines what it will be like to have the prison doors opened. And then the Department of Homeland Security announces it will appeal. The young man will remain behind bars until the next hearing - months or years away.

How the gold has grown dim, how the pure gold is changed. The sacred stones lie scattered at the head of every street. The precious children of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold - how they are reckoned as earthen pots, the work of a potter's hands. Even the jackals offer breast and nurse their young, but my people have become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives them anything. (Lamentations 4:1-4)

ALL: Another loss. More broken dreams. Freedom so near, but the gate remains locked. Outside the gates, building a new life is where he longs to be. Set them free, O Lord, set them free.

Sung Litany: “Change My Heart” (“Change our hearts, O God ...”) (2 or more times)



10. Jesus is stripped of His garments.

A vanload of female asylum seekers arrives at the prison from another prison. There are no criminals in that van, only women who have been persecuted and raped in their countries. They enter the prison, are stripped, searched and questioned. They are degraded and demeaned in their quest for freedom.

And they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of the Skull); they offered Him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when He tasted it, He would not drink it. And when they had crucified Him, they divided His clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over Him. Over His head, they put the charge against Him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." (Matthew 27:33-37)

ALL: Many have lost hope. Each night, behind bars, their tears fall. The women dream of lost children, violated bodies, heavy fines, imprisonment, and destroyed homes and lives. They have nothing and now what little dignity they clung to has been destroyed. Set them free, O Lord, set them free.

Sung Litany: "Here I Am, Lord"



11. Jesus is nailed to the Cross.

A young woman, a victim of female genital mutilation, stands before the immigration judge. She is terrified; she knows she will be persecuted if sent back. The judge does not believe she is in danger. She is ordered deported.

Then two bandits were crucified with Him, one on His right and one on His left. Those who passed by derided Him, shaking their heads and saying, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way, the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, saying, "He saved others, He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down from the cross now and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He wants to; for He said, 'I am God's Son.'" The bandits who were crucified with Him also taunted Him in the same way. (Matt. 27:38-44)

ALL: Hatred, prejudice, injustice abound. The nails are driven. Christ said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another." The world did not hear. Instead, it shouts "crucify." In agony, the asylum seekers cry out for freedom, for sanity, for their lives. Set them free, O Lord, set them free.

Sung Litany: "Were You There?" (1 Verse: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord ...")



12. Jesus dies on the Cross.

Behind bars, all hope is gone. Asylum seekers, men and women, who were persecuted in their homelands, attempt suicide. The shame of imprisonment and sentences without end are more than they can bear. Others ask to be returned to their homelands. Perhaps it is better to run and hide than to be behind bars. Perhaps it is simply better to die.

"My God, my God, why have you deserted me?" (Mark 15:34)

ALL: Desperate for freedom, they find ways out. Desperate for freedom they choose death over life. Our brothers, our sisters, our friends. Those of whom Christ said, "Whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me." For them there is no freedom, only oppression. Set them free, O Lord, set them free.

Sung Litany: "Were You There?" (1 Verse: "Were you there when they nailed him to the tree ...?")



13. Jesus is taken down from the Cross and laid in the arms of His mother.

The churches and people of our land are ready and waiting. When asylum or parole is granted and the prison doors are opened, there is a home waiting for each and every asylum seeker in need.

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for Him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. (Matthew 27:55-61)

ALL: If sent back, they may not survive. They risk further imprisonment. Some will be placed, dead, in the arms of their mothers. This is not Your justice, Lord. This is not your will. Set them free, O Lord, set them free.

Sung Litany: "Were You There?" (1 Verse: "Were you there when they pierced him in the side ...?")



14. Jesus is placed in the tomb.

Asylum seekers are entombed behind bars. Their lives have stopped. There is no definite end to their sentence - there is no set freedom day. Their time in prison depends on the workings of the Department of Homeland Security.

Imprisoned so needlessly, they are entombed in darkness, waiting for their resurrection to a new life.

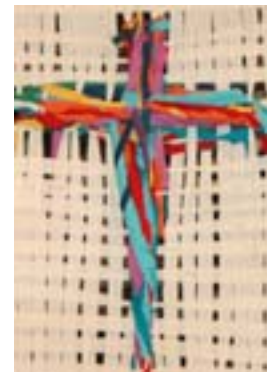
When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. Then he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. (Matt. 27:57-61)

ALL: Our government is crucifying them. The nails have been driven. Darkness covers their lives. The clang of iron gates seals their fate again and again. They are entombed. Outside the gates those who love them wait. Set them free, O Lord, set them free.

Sung Litany: "Were You There?" (2 Verses: "Were you there when the sun refused to shine? ... Were you there when they laid him in the tomb ...?")

Closing Prayer

Closing Hymn: "Sanctuary"



NOTES:

The words Jesus read as he stood to speak in the synagogue for the first time were remembered in preparing for this service:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19)

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Cross Photo by Kathleen Cameron



Please feel free to adapt this service to meet your needs. It can be done indoors or outdoors. It has been done numerous times on Concord Road across from the York County Prison in York, Penn., where the "Stations" were designated at intervals along a one-mile stretch of road.

The blank space on the inside of the front cover is for your use. Please use it for information about your church or organization. Also, please use it to give participants in The Stations of the Cross actions to take following the service.

Hymn Sources: United Methodist Church Hymnal (Kum Ba Yah, #494; We Shall Overcome, #533; Here I Am, Lord, #593; Were You There?, #288). **Unitarian Universalist Hymnal** (Sleep My Child, #409). Eddie Espinosa, 1982 Mercy/Vineyard (Change My Heart). John Thompson and Randy Scruggs (Sanctuary). Feel free to make appropriate substitutions and/or to contact Joan Maruskin for further information.

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