

Stations of the Cross at CiB 2009

Some History...

The stations are a Christian tradition that is both older and newer as it reflects an ancient desire and practice to follow in the actual steps of Jesus in Jerusalem and reflects a more recent codification into a concrete form and practice.

Ancient Christian tradition says that Mary, the mother of Christ, would often retrace the steps of her son after his death, burial and resurrection. St. Jerome (4th Century) writes about the pilgrims visiting Jerusalem and visiting the important places in the life, ministry and Passion of Christ, though nothing in his or contemporary writings point to something recognizable as today's Stations of the Cross.

Tidbits and a little Timeline Info...

- Earliest practices ranged from nine stations to thirty-one with most options in between
- By the 15th Century we begin to hear the word "Stations" used commonly
- Around in the 17th Century the Franciscans started to lead the way with the Stations
- Our common set of fourteen have been in use since the 18th Century
- The Franciscans still hold a special connection to the Stations

Intent...

For the beginning the intent was to draw closer to Christ in an approximation of his steps on that fateful day of betrayal, suffering and sacrifice. It was done so that those following the way of the Stations might be able to experience a deeper empathy of their Lord.

Later, as the practice grew and increased, the Stations became heavily associated with obtaining "indulgences," an extra-sacramental spiritual practice uncommon to most Protestant Christians and historically important and problematic for many Catholic Christians. Since we at Church in Bethesda do not practice the dispensation of indulgences it will not figure heavily in our experience of the Stations. I would ask only that any research you might undertake to understand indulgences would be prayerful, honest and filled with a spirit of Grace. Though we might not interact with indulgences, we certainly have little license to denigrate or ridicule the faithful practice of another sister or brother in Christ.

Content of the Stations...

One of the problems that most Protestant Christians have with today's set of Stations is the undeniable fact that some of the events do not represent the witness of scripture. In short, the Stations give us a glimpse into both scripture and other Christian Tradition. Remember that we are exercising our imagination along the way of praying with the Stations, not just our intellects.

Prayers at the Stations...

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

After: "Lord Jesus, help us walk in your steps."

Beginning Dedication:

"God of power and mercy, in love you sent your Son that we might be cleansed of sin and live with you forever. Bless us as we gather to reflect on his suffering and death that we may learn from his example the way we should go. We ask this through that same Christ, our Lord. Amen."

The Fourteen Contemporary Stations of the Cross:

1. Jesus Condemned to Die
2. Jesus Carries His Cross
3. Jesus Falls the First Time
4. Jesus Meets His Mother
5. Simon of Cyrene Carries the Cross
6. Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus
7. Jesus Falls the Second Time
8. The Women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus Falls a Third Time
10. Jesus' Clothes are Taken
11. Jesus is Nailed to the Cross
12. Jesus Dies on the Cross
13. Jesus is Removed from the Cross
14. Jesus is Laid in the Tomb

Let's talk about imagination and getting to know Christ:

Three falls and Veronica... even though the Stations contain elements that are not attested to in scripture, we can connect with the story and exercise our imaginations in a way that does not detract from what we do find in scripture. Our goal is to connect with a suffering Christ, not just memorize some chronological facts.

Where's the Happy Ending?

This is the big question for most Protestant Christians, right? I grew up without crucifixes, because, "Jesus wasn't on the cross anymore!" I grew up without Lent, because it was "too Catholic." I grew up with a rushed Easter story that zoomed with blinding speed to the resurrection, ***the happy ending***. We lose some of the connection with Christ when we rush to resolution. Paul writes about an un-rushed journey of knowing Christ in the fullness of his resurrection, his suffering and death. I don't want to shy away from these things, either through some kind of embarrassment or impatience.

Philippians 3:10-11

"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."

Of course, the beauty of our faith is that the happy ending does come... but it just doesn't resolve in 45 minutes. Not all my days are happy days. Not all my cares and anxieties resolve in tidy little packages like my favorite TV shows or movies. Sometimes, the suffering is a very real thing that leads to the resolution.

So we seek, and we wait, and we experience, and we walk the Way...

PS – Though we have not setup a series of Stations at Church in Bethesda, we do have a series of artist renderings of the Stations arrayed across the altar for the next few weeks.