

The Stations of the Cross and the Beatitudes, Week 8 2021ⁱ
April 3rd Holy Saturday

Beatitude Nine: *“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

The Jesus Seminar scholars reached consensus that this Beatitude is more of a reflection of the early church’s interpretation of Jesus than of the words of the historical Jesus. No wonder, then, that the last Beatitude resonates so much with the Passion story, offering an understanding of the redemptive result of the persecution and crucifixion of Jesus.

The prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures spoke truth to power, even when that power threatened their lives. It is remarkable to consider that the holy scripture of the Jewish people was preserved for so long even though it included long rants against the injustices and excesses of its kings, who surely must have been tempted to censor its revolutionary contents. The tradition of honouring the utterances of prophets who were believed to speak on behalf of God was strong enough to survive the despotism of so many of Israel’s rulers. Likewise, the Christian gospel, with its revolutionary message of liberation, has survived and spread in spite of times of tyranny and oppression over two millennia. The mere existence of the Bible points to the power of honouring a Law of Love that is higher than any human authority. A great reward for humanity comes through the courage of people who stand up for the divine values of compassion, kindness, and peacefulness, no matter the cost.



Station Thirteen: Jesus’ body is taken down from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea.

Joseph of Arimathea was a powerful Jew who risked his life and reputation to offer respect for Jesus by honouring his body after death. He arranged for Jesus’ body to be lovingly wrapped and buried in dignity. Joseph was a secret admirer of Jesus, but dared not publicly expose his sentiments.

The Mary is the same Iraqi peasant woman from Station IV. Mary Magdalene kneels and holds Jesus’ feet. Figures cluster around the foot of the cross. Barbed wire traces across the background.

The Grail legends tell that Joseph of Arimathea took possession of the cup that Jesus used in the last supper, and that he put the cup under Jesus’ wound when he was speared by the soldiers, and gathered Jesus’ blood. He then took the cup — the Holy Grail — with him to England, where he threw it into the well at Glastonbury to protect it.



Station Fourteen: Jesus’ body is placed in the tomb .

Inspired by a 16th Century Flemish painting by Petrus Christus, Jesus’ dead body fills the foreground about to be wrapped for burial. In the centre, Mary reaches out to gently touch his shoulder as if he were asleep (based on a photo of a mother grieving her dead child from Beslan in Russia). Behind is the open mouth of the tomb with the wheel of stone waiting to be rolled into place.

But that which was put into the earth came out of the earth three days later, transformed. As St. Paul said, “It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body” (I Corinthians 15: 44). One need not believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead in order to fully experience the meaning and power of this story. The three days correspond to the three trimesters of human gestation. Jesus’ physical body went in, but the eternal, universal, and ever-present Christ came out. The pain and terror and horror of crucifixion went in,

but hope and promise came out. Jesus' body went into the tomb, but a new and wonderful kind of community of God came out, three days later.

Questions:

- i) When have you witnessed the rewards resulting from the actions of people, including perhaps yourself, who have suffered hardship because they stood up for justice and peace?
- ii) When is it best to be a Joseph of Arimathea? – and work quietly and without fanfare in the service of others?
- iii) Who has been a Joseph of Arimathea in your life? – quietly and secretly supporting and serving you?
- iv) What new life will come from the parts of your life that have died, or must die?
- v) What new life will come to society, after we say goodbye to the ways of our common life that are unjust and unhealthy?
- vi) How are you changing right now? What is gestating within you? – about to emerge from the dark tomb and womb of your unknowing?
- vii) What is your view about what happens, if anything, after or through death? How does your view of an afterlife affect the way you live now? What would it mean to have “heaven on earth”?

Meditation on your Lenten Action:

Where do you find resonance, meaning, and inspiration in this Station, and in these Beatitudes, in the course of your work of service or advocacy so far?

Artistic expression:

Make a “tomb” out of any media – a dark, hidden place with a small opening. Into it put cards or notes expressing your hopes for “heaven on earth” – your visions of fulfilment, peace, justice, wholeness, beauty, and joy – for yourself and the world. Share the “tomb” with others who can put in more notes, and/or remove them to view.

ⁱ Recommended books to accompany this Lent study: adapted from [James Burklo](#)

Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary (Paperback)
by Marcus J. Borg (Harper One, 2008)
Campaign Boot Camp: Basic Training for Future Leaders (Paperback)
by Christine Pelosi (Polipoint Press, 2007)

The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus's Final Week in Jerusalem (Hardcover)
by Marcus J. Borg, John Dominic Crossan (Harper One, 2006)

Jesus: A New Vision by Marcus Borg (Harper One, 1991)

The Five Gospels: The search for the authentic words of Jesus, by the Jesus Seminar (Polebridge Press, 1993)