

## **Follow Jesus.....To the Cross A Lenten Devotion**

Our WA-AK LWML district theme this biennium is "Follow Jesus....Walk the Path." This Lenten devotion will follow the last few days of Jesus. We will follow Jesus...***on the path to the cross***. This devotion is based on the traditional stations of the cross. As we prepare for the season of Lent, we remember how our Lord Jesus suffered and set his face toward the cross of Calvary for us sinners.

The stations of the cross, also called the Via Dolorosa (Latin for "Way of Suffering"), is a spiritual pilgrimage of prayer and meditation based on the chief scenes of the suffering and death of Christ. Often considered merely a Roman Catholic practice, this series of meditations is beneficial for all Christians. The practice originated in Jerusalem where pilgrims would come to retrace the steps in the final days of Jesus. People in other lands wished for a way to do this locally so the church began to erect "stations" or roadside chapels that led to churches depicting scenes from Holy Week. People could stop and pray at each station remembering different aspects of the sufferings of our Savior. By the 1800's, many churches worldwide offered stations of the cross, though not always outside structures but inside paintings, wooden crosses, tapestries, or sculptures. Originally, only eight of the fourteen stations had Biblical foundation because some of the stations came from church traditions and legends. However, in 1991, Pope John Paul II introduced the "Scriptural Way of the Cross." These stations were more closely aligned with the Bible's Holy Week account. People often do this series of meditations, hymns, and prayers during the season of Lent. The stations of the cross have also inspired some of the greatest pieces of Christian artwork.

In the following devotion we will meditate on all fourteen stations of the cross. There will be a scripture reading, a brief meditation, a hymn verse suggestion, and a prayer for each station. You may use this as a personal devotion during Lent or as a group meditation. If you can find artwork/pictures to go with each station, that would be an added benefit. You can find a lot of artwork online that show the stations of the cross.

I find "Jesus, I Will Ponder Now" (LSB 440) to be a meaningful hymn to begin each day's devotion.

God grant you a blessed Lenten season as we thank Jesus "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross....." (Heb. 12:2)

## **Station #1 Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane**

And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."  
(Luke 22:39-46)

Follow Jesus and his disciples to the garden. What images come to mind? Perhaps the famous painting of Jesus leaning on the rock praying to his Father. Perhaps the first image that comes to mind is blood seeping through our Savior's skin. Or maybe disciples sleeping on the eve of the most important day in the history of the world. What do you think Jesus was thinking about as he prayed? I heard it once simply said that Jesus was thinking of us. He had us in mind as He submitted to his Father's will and set his face to the cross. Thank you, Jesus, for submitting to your Father's will perfectly for us and for suffering the weight of our sins on your shoulders.

Sing/read verse 1 of "Go to Dark Gethsemane" (LSB 436)

Dear Jesus, we come to you sorry for the sins that caused you so much agony in the garden. Thank you for submitting to your Father's will even though it caused you unimaginable pain. Help us to strive to always do your will in all things. Keep us ever watchful and awake, armed with your power and word, so that we "may not enter into temptation." Amen.

## **Station #2 Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested**

While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said to him, "Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"  
(Luke 22:47-48)

We continue with Jesus in the garden. Judas approaches and gives Jesus the kiss of betrayal. Have you ever been called a "Judas?" Have you ever betrayed someone who trusted you? How about betraying God? Have you ever failed to do the right thing for God especially out of greed and rebellion as Judas did? Do you worship God with your lips, but then turn around and sin against him with your actions? We often are just like Judas when we put ourselves and wishes before our Savior. Thank you, Jesus, for not betraying us, for faithfully doing

what you said you would do for us, and by continuing to the cross out of love for us.

Sing/read verse 1 of "When You Woke That Thursday Morning" (LSB 445)

Heavenly Father, please forgive us for the times we have betrayed you by our thoughts, words, and actions. We thank you for the forgiveness you offer so that we do not have to die in despair as Judas did. Amen.

### **Station #3 Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin**

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes. And they led him away to their council, and they said, "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe, and if I ask you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God." So they all said, "Are you the Son of God, then?" And he said to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips."

(Luke 22:66-71)

Follow Jesus to the court. Hear the crowds debating who this man really is. Most think he is a troublemaker, some think he is a great teacher, some are his loyal followers. Who do you say he is? Is he the God you go to only when you need something? Is he the God that taught you some nice morals? We sometimes forget that he is the Christ, the "Anointed One," who came to fulfill God's promise to the world. This Christ fulfilled God's law by living the perfect life in our place and to die a terrible death in our place. May we never forget that Jesus is more than just a wish-granter and teacher. Thank you, Jesus, for being our substitute in every way necessary so that we may receive, with you, all of heaven's treasures.

Sing/read verse 1 of "O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken" (LSB 439)

Dear Jesus, forgive us for the times we doubt who you are. Thank you for proclaiming yourself to be God. Help us to always proclaim you to be the only God. Amen.

#### **Station #4 Jesus is denied by Peter**

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

(Luke 22:54-62)

We continue with Jesus in the courtyard. Our eyes turn to Peter, the often outspoken but dedicated disciple. What drove Peter to deny the Christ, of whom he said he would die for? Fear. Fear can make us do things we wouldn't normally do. Peter feared for his life and he denied even knowing his Lord. How could he do that after all he had seen Jesus do? What about us? Do we sometimes fear how others will react to us when we confess knowing and trusting in Jesus? Do we sometimes refrain from speaking the truth from fear of how others might look at us? Yes, we too are Peters, and deserve to be disowned by God. Thank you, Jesus, for offering forgiveness to Peter and for forgiving us too when we deny you in thought, word, and deed.

Sing/read verse 2 of "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted" (LSB 451)

Heavenly Father, please forgive us for the times we have denied knowing you by our actions and our words. We weep as Peter did for the ways we have wanted nothing to do with you or your word. Thank you for dying for these sins too and we are forever grateful that you continued to the cross so that we might be forgiven. Amen.

## **Station #5 Jesus is judged by Pilate**

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed... So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.  
(Matthew 27:11-14, 24-26)

Follow Jesus to Pilate's hall. We are reminded of Pilate's deeds every time we confess the creed, "suffered under Pontius Pilate..." Pilate gets blamed for sending Jesus to death, but we know that it was our sins that put Jesus on the cross. Pilate's problem was that he didn't want to acknowledge his role in this unjustifiable execution. He wanted to wash his hands of this wrongdoing. Are we ever like Pilate? Do we refuse to take responsibility for our sins, excuse them away, deny having any part of them? All too often this is true. Some people don't even like the confession part of our services because they don't like to hear they are sinners in need of repentance. Thank you, Jesus, for taking responsibility for our sins and paying the price for them with your innocent blood.

Sing/read verse 3 of "No Tramp of Soldiers' Marching Feet" (LSB 444)

Heavenly Father, forgive us for the times we don't want to take responsibility for our own sinful actions like Pilate. Forgive us for the times we make excuses and want to "wash away our sinful actions." You washed us in the waters of Baptism. Help us to remember that as we daily confess our sins and are renewed in the healing of your forgiveness. Amen.

## **Station #6 Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns**

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.  
(Matthew 27:27-31)

Follow Jesus to the governor's headquarters. It's hard to watch the soldiers mocking and torturing our Lord. We think to ourselves "I would never do that."

Or would we? Every time we disobey God ... slap! Every time we love something more than God ... whip! Every time we cheapen God's death by thinking "I'm going to do this wrong thing because God will forgive me anyways" ... puncture! Every time we hurt our neighbor ... spit! Every time we refuse to forgive someone ... punch! That's right, we do not hurt God with reeds and thorns, but our sins today contributed to his suffering at his trial and crucifixion. Forgive us God for exacting such pain! Thank you, Jesus, for suffering amongst the soldiers for us because of your great love for us sinners.

Sing/read verse 1 of "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" (LSB 449)

Dear Jesus, we are so sorry that our sins caused you to suffer in such a horrible way. Your pain must have been unbearable. Thank you for taking our place of punishment. We thank you that because you wore that crown of thorns, we will wear a crown of glory. Keep us ever mindful of the agony that brought to us salvation. Amen.

### **Station #7 Jesus takes up His cross**

...[A]nd he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.  
(John 19:17)

Follow Jesus as he walks to Golgotha. How tired Jesus must have been at this point after his trials and beatings. Now, he had to even carry his own cross. As heavy as that cross must have been, it was nothing compared to the weight of the sins of the world bearing down on him. Only God's love for us could will him to continue this terrible path to a terrible death. Oh, what love Jesus has for us! We often talk about "bearing our crosses," but at least we have a Savior who promises to help us bear those crosses. Thank you, Jesus, for taking the sins of the world with you to the cross, and thank you for helping us bear whatever cross we encounter for your sake.

Sing/read verse 1 of "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth" (LSB 438)

Continued thanks, Jesus, that you kept walking that Friday all the way to the cross. You could've given up, but because of your love for us, you continued that dreadful path to the crucifixion. Every agonizing step you took brought you closer to our redemption. As we walk through this life, may we always hold your cross up high for all the world to see so others may learn and receive your free gift of salvation. Amen.

## **Station #8 Jesus is helped by Simon to carry His cross**

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.  
(Luke 23:26)

Follow Jesus on the road to Calvary. See all the crowds here for the Passover. Jesus was weak and tired and so a stranger was plucked out of the crowd to help carry the cross of Christ. What do you think Simon was thinking? Was he scared and confused? Was he angry for an interruption to his plans? We don't know what he was thinking, but we do know that he complied and carried the cross to Calvary. How about us? Are we always ready to serve God at a moment's notice? Some think that Simon's name was recorded because he later became a Christian. If so, this cross carrying might have been a life-changing moment for him. Have you had any life-changing moments? We who are baptized children of God had our life changed in the waters of baptism. Let us always remember this truly life-changing moment and be ready to serve our Lord wherever he has need of us. Thank you, Jesus, for using Simon to help fulfill your plan.

Sing/read verse 6 of "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" (LSB 549)

Heavenly Father, we see how you used a relatively unknown man to help your Son carry his cross to Golgotha. Please help us to be always ready to serve you as you use us to serve our neighbor in their time of need. As this was probably a life-changing experience for Simon, may we always remember our baptism, and the life-changing gifts you gave to us there. Amen.

## **Station #9 Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem**

And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"  
(Luke 23:27-31)

Follow Jesus with the crowds. Jesus told the women not to "weep for me." Jesus was doing his Father's will. He didn't need anyone to weep over him. He was willingly being led to the slaughter. Instead, he warned them of a future destruction, the destruction of Jerusalem, which later came at the hands of the Roman army. The people of Jerusalem were in the process of rejecting the One who had come to save them and God's judgment would be upon them. Even as he was about to die, he was lovingly urging them to repent and follow him and to acknowledge him as the Messiah. Thank you, Jesus, for taking every opportunity

to point people to yourself as the Savior, even in the midst of your pain.

Sing/read verse 1 of "The Clouds of Judgment Gather" (LSB 513)

Dear Jesus, we, like the women, weep over our sins and we weep over your death. Though you were speaking to them of the future destruction of Jerusalem, we are thankful that we do not need to fear a future final destruction because of your act of salvation on our behalf. Help us to remember and to weep for what it cost you to grant us our salvation. Amen.

### **Station #10 Jesus is crucified**

And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.  
(Mark 15:23-32)

Follow Jesus as they nail him to the cross. A crucifixion was certainly one of the most painful events to witness. In these days of execution by lethal injection, crucifixion seems so gruesome. We don't even like getting shots with needles. Imagine a spike being driven through the skin and bones of your hands and feet. God required blood shed for forgiveness, and a crucifixion surely filled this requirement. Then to add to the horrific scene, people mocked Jesus as he suffered, scorning his kingship. Do we ever minimize the kingship of Jesus? Do we sometimes not trust him fully to work in our best interest as our loving king? Do we share our allegiance to him with other people or things in our lives? Do we try to help in our salvation in any way, thereby belittling his work alone for our salvation? We too sin by stripping Jesus of his kingship in our lives. Thank you, Jesus, for making your cross a throne as our King, and for remaining our King even when we often don't treat you like one.

Sing/read "On My Heart Imprint Your Image" (LSB 422)

Dear Jesus, thank you so much for choosing to stay on the cross as the people tempted you to come down and save yourself. In mockery they named you king, but we are thankful that because you are the King You had control over that situation too and chose to be a king who would die for his people. Please help us

never to take your death for granted, and continually remind us that your death brought our peace with God. Amen.

### **Station #11 Jesus promises His kingdom to the repentant thief**

And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments. ...One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

(Luke 23:33-34, 39-43)

Follow Jesus as he responds to the thief next to him. What a contrast between the two thieves. It's like a picture of all people in the world who are in need of rescue, spiritual rescue. Some refuse to hear and might even mock. Some repent and trust Jesus to rescue them from everlasting death. The beauty of this part of the Passion is that the repentant thief didn't have a chance to "earn" his salvation. It was a free gift, given immediately to a dying man. What about us? Do we recognize the utter gravity of that moment, that a totally helpless man received salvation from the Savior? Do we acknowledge our utter helplessness and our inability to contribute anything to our salvation? Thank you, Jesus, for seeing each of us in our powerlessness and telling us that someday, "you will be with me in paradise."

Sing/read verses 4 & 5 of "Jesus, in Your Dying Woes" (LSB 447)

Dear Jesus, we thank you for the unmerited forgiveness and mercy you showed to the thief at your side. He had no works to save him, and you showed that only trust in you is what brings us forgiveness and eternal life. Thank you for being merciful to us too and for promising us paradise. Forgive us for when we try to add to your work at the cross with our good deeds and give us pure trust in your saving work "once for all." May we respond with good works in simple thanksgiving for all the heavenly blessings you shower upon us. Amen.

## **Station #12 Jesus entrusts Mary and John to one another**

...but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

(John 19:25-27)

Follow Jesus as he comforts his mother and friend. What a tender moment from the cross. How it must have hurt Jesus to see his mother watching him suffer. Nobody likes to see a loved one suffer. Yet in his agony, he takes care of his mother entrusting her to his beloved disciple John. How do we react in our own sufferings? Usually we are so wrapped up in ourselves, feeling sorry for ourselves, that we can't see others around us who may be suffering too. Let us take a lesson from Jesus. When we are suffering, be a servant. Lean on Jesus for strength to bear our sufferings and then reach out to help others. Thank you, Jesus, for caring for your mother from the cross. Help us at all times to be ready to serve someone else in love.

Sing/read verses 7 & 9 of "Jesus, in Your Dying Woes" (LSB 447)

Dear Jesus, how loving you were to your mother and friend. As you suffered, you took time to make sure your mother was taken care of. As an earthly son, you fulfilled your duties, but even more as the Son of God, you fulfilled your Father's plan for the salvation of the world. Help us to love our family members as you did and especially to be faithful sons and daughters of our Father in heaven. Amen.

## **Station #13 Jesus dies on the cross**

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

(Matthew 27:45-54)

Follow Jesus to his dying moment. What a scene to witness. Rocks splitting apart, bodies of dead believers coming back to life, darkness, temple curtains ripping, and many other probably terrifying sights. The whole earth was involved in this moment in history. God himself, dead on a tree. The centurion witnessed these events and proclaimed Jesus to be the "Son of God." How about us? Do we look for more signs and wonders like these to recognize the Son of God among us? God does give these to us. Not in earthquakes and resurrections, but in Word and Sacrament. The same Jesus on the cross is the Word we hear and read. The same Jesus on the cross gives us his body and blood to eat and drink. Thank you, Jesus, for still proclaiming to us today that you are truly the Son of God.

Sing/read verse 5 of "O Perfect Life of Love" (LSB 452)

Dear Jesus, your innocent death brought us peace with God. How can we ever thank you enough for your suffering and dying in our place? In our baptism, we were united in your death, and our sins were put in the tomb forever. In that one moment of history, the salvation of mankind was accomplished. What an amazing gift! Keep us ever mindful of the sacrifice you made for us. Amen.

#### **Station #14 Jesus is laid in the tomb**

Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning.  
(Luke 23:50-54)

Follow Jesus to the tomb. A sad ending to an agonizing day. The followers of Jesus must have been devastated and devoid of any joy. Their teacher and friend was gone. Their hope was buried with Jesus in the tomb. They did not yet realize that there was something more buried in that tomb. Just as the body of Jesus was placed in the tomb, even so were our sins buried with him, done away with forever. In our baptism, we were buried with Christ and were given the gift of forgiveness. Thank you, Jesus, for taking our sins with you to the grave and help us to look forward with joy to our Easter celebration because your tomb is empty.

Sing/read verses 1, 2, & 7 of "O Darkest Woe" (LSB 448)

Dear Jesus, as your body was laid in the tomb, the reality of your death strikes us to the heart. This wasn't a charade, it was real death. The Son of God dead in a cave. Our thanks seem so lacking at times. Give us the zeal and boldness to reach out with the joyful message of your death, burial, and resurrection to a world that needs to hear about it. Amen.

### Final Thoughts

As we finish our meditation on the path to the cross, I pray you were blessed by this time of reflection on God's Word. And now we get to turn our eyes to Easter. We get to follow Jesus out of the tomb! The "Way of Suffering" has become the "Way of Hope and Joy." Let us thank God that Jesus burst forth from the tomb three days after his death. We can follow Jesus out of the tomb where we can rejoice that he defeated death for us. We can follow Jesus knowing that we too will rise to eternal life in heaven. We can follow and rejoice that because of Easter we have a hope that never disappoints. The Lord who suffered, died and rose for you bless and keep you always as you "Follow Jesus...Walk the Path."

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