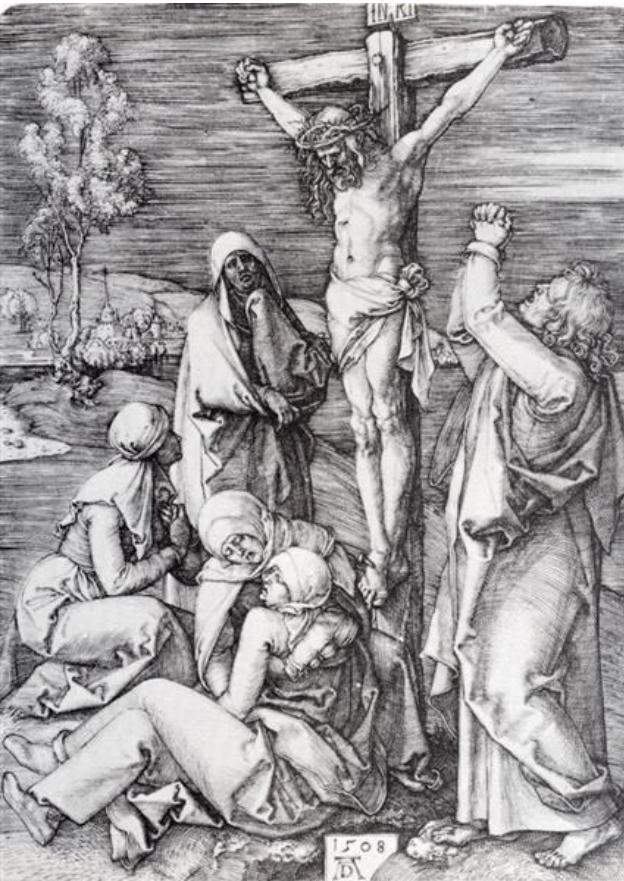


The Way of the Cross

Observations from the Crowd



An Ecumenical Service

In Waynesboro, VA

April 18, 2025

Introduction

L. Lord, by the suffering of Christ your Son, you saved us from the death we inherited from sinful Adam. By the law of nature we have borne the likeness of his humanity. May the sanctifying power of grace help us to put on the likeness of our Lord in heaven, who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

All. **Amen.**

Opening Prayer, Good Friday Liturgy, Roman Rite

L. Let us exalt our minds, kindle our hearts;

All. **let us not quench our spirits, but let us be uplifted in soul and hasten nearby to suffer with one incapable of suffering. Let us lay aside all tiresome arguments and attach ourselves to the One on the cross. If it seems right, let us all go along with Peter to the house of Caiaphas, and with him let us cry to Christ the words of Peter long ago: “Even if he goes to the cross and enters the tomb—I suffer with you, and I shall die with you.”**

Romanos, sixth century

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

The First Station:

The Agony of Jesus in the Garden of Olives

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All. **Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.**

L. ***I am James.*** The Master brought us to the garden after the Passover meal that night. He had spoken of frightening events—of darkness, and danger, and death. We were exhausted. We couldn't stay awake. He walked a short distance from us, and immersed in prayer he took upon himself the suffering we deserved for our sins. His love for us knew no limits. He was willing to give his life for us, and suffer in our place. Yet we did not know his sorrow. Instead, we sought comfort in the embrace of sleep.

L. How can I sleep at night knowing many of my sisters and brothers go hungry?
All. **They face violence and injustice each day. They have nothing to look forward to but more poverty and want. I cannot take their suffering as Jesus did, but I can share their burden. They must carry their cross, as I must carry mine. But when we walk together, the journey is not so harsh. We can comfort one another while we bear the burden of pain and suffering.**

*Were you there when he prayed God's will be done?
Were you there when he prayed God's will be done?
O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when he prayed God's will be done?*

The Second Station:

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All. **Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.**

L. ***I am a Roman soldier.*** I walked into a garden that night with other soldiers and agitators sent by the local elders. We brought weapons and torches to arrest a man we were told was a danger to the empire. When he saw us approach, he did not run. He did not hide. There was a mild scuffle and a man's ear was cut off. Then his betrayer kissed him. It was our signal. We bound him and took him back to the city. But I feel sorry for the man who handed him over. I found out he was paid thirty silver pieces. And the condemned man called him "friend."

L. There is not much difference between Judas and me.
All. **Every time I turn my back on people in need, every time I ignore the poor as someone else's responsibility, every time I put down my faith or other people of faith, I betray my Lord with a kiss of friendship. I would never knowingly deny Him; but I am slow to defend Him. I am slow to forgive; yet I ask forgiveness often, and I am often undeserving. Forgive me, Lord. And help me to forgive.**

*Were you there when his friends betrayed their Lord?
Were you there when his friends betrayed their Lord?
O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when his friends betrayed their Lord?*

The Third Station:
The Sanhedrin Condemns Jesus

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All. **Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.**

L. *I am Nicodemus*, a member of the Sanhedrin. We were called to a meeting in the middle of the night. The Passover was days away, and the city was alive with pilgrims and travelers. Many asked about the Master, who spoke of God in new ways, and performed powerful signs. A few in the council secretly admired him. So we suggested he address the council, and explain his new ideas. We thought he would move the hearts of our leaders, and inspire the people in true worship of God and service to others. But our leaders deceived us. They did not want to hear him. They only wanted to silence him. He came to give us life, but we sent him to his death.

L. We choose leaders to act on our behalf.
All. **So we bear some responsibility when they close their eyes to truth,
when they harden their hearts, when they disregard God's law.**
**Give them wisdom to uphold your justice,
and courage to uphold your mercy.**
**Help us choose leaders after your heart,
to build up your people and care for the poor.**
Help us to live your truth in service to others.

*Were you there when they sent him to his death?
Were you there when they sent him to his death?
O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they sent him to his death?*

The Fourth Station:
Peter Denies Jesus

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All. **Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.**

L. *I serve the household of the high priest.* I saw a friend of that condemned man warming himself by the fire. He was a Galilean. He had fisherman's hands, and spoke with an accent. And when I pointed him out to those around the fire, he was very upset. He denied knowing the condemned man. He was nervous and agitated. He was afraid no one would believe him. I didn't believe him. I remember hearing a cock crow. Then he ran out into the darkness. He was no longer trying to hide his tears. He lied about knowing his friend. It is a tough place to be in. I can understand his anguish. How do you forgive yourself for betraying a friend?

L. Carelessly, I deny you every day.
All. **When I make choices based on self-respect,**
 I declare my loyalty to false and empty gods.
When I can waste time and energy on distractions
 but turn away from opportunities for mercy and compassion,
 I uphold allegiance to self-love and passing things.
Touch my heart with your grace and melt away my selfishness.
Renew my weary spirit.
Help me to shed tears of contrition for my betrayals,
 and like Peter, help me return to your friendship.

Were you there when his friends denied their Lord?
Were you there when his friends denied their Lord?
O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when his friends denied their Lord?

The Fifth Station:
Pilate Condemns Jesus to the Cross

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All. **Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.**

L. ***I am Barabbas.*** The crowd forced Pilate to release me from prison on the eve of Passover in the hope he might set Jesus free instead. His plan backfired. Previously I was arrested for my involvement in an uprising where a number of soldiers were killed. I have never claimed innocence. But my people have suffered greatly from the unjust Roman occupation. Now the man Jesus of Nazareth did nothing wrong. They treated him without mercy, but he never said a word. The soldiers whipped, and mocked, and beat him. And when Pilate brought him before the crowd, bruised and broken, he could have set him free. But when a lone voice cried for his death, they all soon demanded the same.

L. I cannot blame the crowd alone.
All. **I have at times stood with them, sometimes horrified,
sometimes thirsting for vengeance.
When I condemn others, I stand in judgment over my neighbor.
When I despise others for their politics, their faith, or their choices,
I fail to reflect your compassion.
Help me be a bridge of reconciliation and hope
for those bound in the prison of hate.**

*Were you there when they set Barabbas free?
Were you there when they set Barabbas free?
O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they set Barabbas free?*

The Sixth Station:

Jesus is Scourged and Crowned with Thorns

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All. Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.

L. *I am a Roman soldier* assigned to the garrison in Jerusalem. I have so often witnessed the torture of criminals, I have learned not to care anymore. When a man sentenced to death is handed over to us, we turn vicious and vengeful. We fail to see them as persons. And violence against them was an acceptable outlet for our rage. I was there when Jesus of Nazareth was beaten and crowned with thorns. We mistreated him, and humiliated him. His silence egged us on. Yet it made our sport even more foolish. How can we hate someone so intensely, when he never hated us back?

L. Hate is a strong word.

All. **I use it against those so evil, I cease to see them as children of God.**

**I use it against abusers of children,
and those who take advantage of the weak.**

I use it against those I cannot love.

But if I hate those who hate me, have I not become that which I despise?

The only Christian response to hate is compassion.

That is why forgiveness is an irrational response.

But it is the only way to end the cycle of hate.

**You show us the power of forgiveness
when you asked your Father to forgive your enemies.**

**Teach me to let go of bitterness;
set me free from the chains of resentment.**

Were you there when with thorns they crowned him king?

Were you there when with thorns they crowned him king?

O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when with thorns they crowned him king?

The Seventh Station:

Jesus is Mocked by the Soldiers and Given His Cross

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All. **Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.**

L. Like the condemned man, ***I am a carpenter*** by trade. I use my skills to assist in the punishment of criminals. I made the crossbeam Jesus carried to his death. But I was just doing my job. It puts food on the table, and a roof over our heads. I am not responsible for his death. Yes, I make crosses; but I don't pick who carries them. It bothers me he died on something my own hands made. His hands fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead, and welcomed children. My hands built a cross on which he died. Did my indifference and apathy contribute to his death? But I was just doing my job.

L. The cross you carried is the cross I should bear.

All. **You chose to suffer punishment in my place.**

I never asked this of you.

You chose suffering to show the depth of God's love

by your willingness to surrender your own life

so I would not have to surrender mine.

It was not for my sins that you carried your cross.

but because of your love for me.

This you have done, my Jesus,

because of the incomparable depth of your compassion.

Were you there when they mocked and scorned their Lord?

Were you there when they mocked and scorned their Lord?

O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they mocked and scorned their Lord?

The Eighth Station:

Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus to Carry His Cross

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All. **Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.**

L. **I am Simon.** I was just minding my own business that day. That didn't stop the soldiers from harassing me, making me carry that awful cross ahead of a condemned man. They would look bad if he died before they could put him to death—officially. I didn't want to pick up his cross. I had my pride and self-respect. I didn't want to be associated with a criminal. Yet as I walked that short distance bearing his cross, I realized it was one last act of kindness. I thought I had better things to do. Yet seeing what he had to bear, I felt foolish. I suppose a lot of what I do and care about aren't really that important. My neighbor's suffering is a powerful way to open my eyes.

L. I see many of my sisters and brothers

All. **walk past me each day carrying their crosses.**

Compared to them, I live in luxury.

I often think I have a right to the blessings in my life.

Open my eyes, Lord, to the suffering of others.

You sometimes ask me to share their burdens,

but I refuse for selfish reasons.

If I knew it was you, I would gladly do it.

Help me to see that it is you

in the poor, the lonely, the sick, and the hungry.

Were you there when a stranger shared his cross?

Were you there when a stranger shared his cross?

O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when a stranger shared his cross?

The Ninth Station:
Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All. Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.

L. *I am Claudia Procula*, the wife of Pontius Pilate. I live in Jerusalem, and I am not a political person. In fact, I greatly regret the way our soldiers mistreat the people. Women wept openly for that man Jesus. I was appalled at the way he was treated. It made me sick to see such violence. And the night before, I had a terrible dream about him. I told my husband to have nothing to do with that man's death. But he did not listen. And when Jesus met some women as he walked to his death, he offered them comfort. Despite his own suffering, his heart went out to them in their suffering. They should have been comforting him.

L. If I saw you suffering, I would be moved to tears.

All. **But you ask of me more than tears.**

**You are always compassionate to sinners,
and you challenge me to faithfulness beyond the observance of rules.**

You ask me to be welcoming and forgiving

**to my neighbor who is undeserving,
because you welcome and forgive me.**

Help me remember that it is by your mercy alone

that I live and move and breathe.

I owe you all I have, and all I am.

Were you there when he tried to ease their grief?

Were you there when he tried to ease their grief?

O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when he tried to ease their grief?

**The Tenth Station:
Jesus is Crucified**

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All. **Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.**

L. *I am a Roman soldier.* That man Jesus was arrested last night, betrayed by his friends, and delivered by his own people. They had no real charge against him. They just wanted him out of their way. Yet he did not resist the abuse they threw at him. Now he hung upon a cross, naked, bloodied, humiliated for all the world to see. Pilgrims were arriving for a religious festival. What a grand spectacle it is to see criminals punished for their crimes. They would often curse God, the emperor, and the world in their agony. They would pray for death to come sooner. But this Jesus was different. He seemed to accept death willingly, convinced it would accomplish a greater purpose. For everyone else, death is the end. But not for him. It was just the beginning.

L. As you hung upon the cross, I am made aware of my sins.
All. **My selfishness and my pride deserve punishment,
my laziness, my jealousy, my dishonesty, my lust.
Yet you tell me, it was your great love and mercy
that made you take up your cross willingly.
Help me take up my cross willingly,
and perhaps contribute to the salvation of sinners like myself.**

*Were you there when they nailed him to a tree?
Were you there when they nailed him to a tree?
O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they nailed him to a tree?*

The Eleventh Station:

Jesus Promises Paradise to the Penitent Criminal

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All. **Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.**

L. ***I was visiting Jerusalem for the Passover.*** I stood with the crowd the day Jesus of Nazareth was put to death. His enemies mocked him relentlessly as he hung on the cross. They had forgotten how he spoke to them of God's mercy, how he healed the sick, how he fed the hungry, how he showed kindness to the poor and the weak. He had no defenders that day, just a few women and old men, fearful for their own lives. We all had a choice that day—to condemn him or to defend him. But his enemies won the shouting match. He needed more than human voices to defend him. Yet even God was silent that day, the God he claimed as his only defense.

L. The thief who died beside you, Lord, did not know you before that day.

All. **Yet in a short time, he professed faith in you,
confessed his sins, and entered eternal life.**

I have known you much longer.

I have encountered you many times in your Word and your Sacrament.

Yet I cannot claim to know you better than the thief you met on Calvary.

Increase my faith.

Were you there when a thief stole paradise?

Were you there when a thief stole paradise?

O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when a thief stole paradise?

The Twelfth Station:

Jesus Speaks to His Mother and to His Disciple

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All. Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.

L. *I am Mary of Magdala*, and I owe the Master my life. I stood with Mary, his mother, and John, his disciple, at the foot of the cross that day. We were so heart-broken, we listened to his every word, his every breath. Then he said to his mother, "Behold, your son," and to John, "Behold your mother." She was all Jesus had left in this world, but he wasn't thinking of himself. And in giving his disciple care for his mother, Jesus was entrusting us all to her in return, to be our mother.

L. You gave us your mother to be our mother.

All. From her words and example, you learned courage,
faithfulness, a humbleness of spirit,
and a willingness to call on God in difficult times.

She teaches us that we are not alone in our struggle.

She leads us to you, so you entrusted us to her care.

Thank you, Lord, for giving us your mother.

Were you there when his mother watched him die?

Were you there when his mother watched him die?

O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when his mother watched him die?

**The Thirteenth Station:
Jesus Dies on the Cross**

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.
All. **Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.**

L. *I am John*, one of his closest friends. I stood at the foot of his cross with his mother. I witnessed his struggle to breathe as he pushed himself up. It was painful beyond words, but he did not cry out. After a shallow breath, he would drop down, his arms stretched out on the crossbeam. He drifted in and out of consciousness. Sometimes he looked at us, sometimes he looked away. Sometimes he spoke for many to hear, sometimes he whispered to no one in particular. Then he quoted the psalm, uttering words so helpless and desolate. He felt so alone. And though we stood close by, we were helpless. I would have willingly died with him that day. Yet he died to show what God was willing to give up to win us back from death and selfishness and sin. He died that we would not have to die. He died that we might live.

L. My Jesus, as you hung upon the cross,
All. **you shared with me an experience totally alien to your nature as God.**
You experienced a distance much like the consequence of sin.
You did not know sin, yet you experienced the loneliness and grief
that grips my heart when I turn my back on you.
Do not abandon me in my moment of darkness.
You are not dissuaded when I resist your grace.
Indeed, while I was still a sinner, you healed me.
How can I ever think you would give up on me?

*Were you there when the Master breathed his last?
Were you there when the Master breathed his last?
O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when the Master breathed his last?*

The Fourteenth Station:
The Burial of Jesus

L. We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you.

All. **Because by your holy cross you have saved the world.**

L. ***I am Joseph of Arimathea***, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin. I had great respect for Jesus of Nazareth, but was too afraid to come to him in public. It mattered no longer what other people thought. And I went to ask Pilate for his body to give him a proper burial. There was not enough time to complete all the rituals. We would have to return before dawn on the third day. I just had to take the nails out of his hands and feet, and wash off the blood and grime that reminded us of his painful agony. We gently laid him in his mother's arms, and were filled with grief. Her pain was beyond understanding. All I could do was assure her he would suffer no more. But it was she who comforted us. She had just lost her only son. Yet in that same instant, she became mother of us all.

L. Finally, your bruised and broken body was laid to rest in a tomb.

All. ***The stone that sealed you in darkness and decay
would become the symbol of your triumph when it is rolled away.***

***You call me to share your suffering, death and resurrection each day,
primarily to selfishness and sin,
that I may come to know the fullness of life in your company,
to give glory to your name, and share in the work of redemption
on behalf of your holy people.***

Were you there when they laid him in a tomb?

Were you there when they laid him in a tomb?

O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they laid him in a tomb?

Closing Prayer

L. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, your passion and death is the sacrifice
that unites earth and heaven and reconciles all people to your Father.
May we who have faithfully reflected on these mysteries
follow in your steps and so come to share your glory in heaven
where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit
one God, for ever and ever.

All. Amen.

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
O—sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

We Depart in Silence.

Many thanks to today's participants from:

*First Baptist
First Presbyterian
Grace Lutheran
Main Street United Methodist
St. John's Episcopal
Union Baptist*

Who helped lead today's worship service.