

THE WOODBRIDGE STATIONS 2009

I – JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

Jesus has already been scourged, and mocked and beaten – he has begun his passion, and had a foretaste of what is to come. Now he awaits the final irrevocable decision of Pilate. Here he also stands beside those who brace themselves to hear the results of tests, the words of the Consultant (sometimes gentle, sometimes brutal), the realisation of what is to come. So often the words wash over them, and it is the families or partners or friends who feel the full force of the lash of the words. Jesus stands with them too.

II – JESUS RECEIVES THE CROSS

After all that he had been through, what was it like for Jesus to feel the weight of the Cross-beam on his shoulders for the first time? To understand that this was it – the moment he knew would come, but for which nothing on earth could have truly prepared him? Here he also stands beside those who understand, perhaps for the first time, that the moment has arrived – the end of treatment, the end of dreams and of hopes and possibilities. Here Jesus bears with the dying, for the first time, the full weight of what it means to be terminally ill.

III – JESUS FALLS FOR THE FIRST TIME

Not enough to bear the weight of dying – he must carry it for some time yet – carry it up the hill, step by step. He is exhausted by the beatings, the lashings, the taunts, the sleeplessness he has already endured. Now he stands with those who, having been so brave, having fought so courageously, having endured so much – chemotherapy, radiotherapy, endless trips to distant hospitals day by day by day – who now just let go and fall – into despair, into a sense of hopelessness, bewilderment – and sheer abject fear.

IV – JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER

Mary must have felt so helpless – barred by the soldiers from being by her son's side to hold him and soothe him as she would have done when, as a child, he'd fallen and hurt his knees, or hit his fingers with his father's hammer. Here Mary now stands with those who, like she, can only stand by – helpless, full of longing and love, unable to do more than simply be there, so that their child, their husband or wife, their loved one knows that they are not alone, ever.

V – SIMON HELPS TO CARRY THE CROSS

Did Jesus feel the relief when the weight was lifted? Hard to imagine he could feel anything by that time. And what about Simon? Did he feel he was doing any good at all? Such a temporary relief, when it was clear that no-one could avoid what was coming. Simon knew he couldn't change the outcome..... but he could change how it was achieved. Here Jesus stands with the palliative care teams, the twilight nurses, the hospice staff, the volunteer flower ladies, the chaplaincy teams. They can't change the outcome – but they can change how it is achieved, they can help to carry the cross for a while. Jesus stands with them because he knows what it will cost them, too.....

VI – VERONICA WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS

Human dignity – that's what Veronica brings to Jesus – such a small thing, to wipe his face, to wipe away the blood and the sweat and the tears so that his eyes wouldn't sting, so that he could look like a man and not a piece of meat – so that he could have dignity. Such a small thing to do but such a great gift to give. Here Veronica stands with those who give the dying their dignity – the hospice laundry staff who ensure that Mum has her favourite nightie; the catering staff who go out of their way to prepare Dad's favourite meals, the ward volunteers who gently moisten the lips of the patients or comb their hair when they are no longer able to do it for themselves, or no longer even aware.

VII – JESUS FALLS FOR THE SECOND TIME

Even though Simon is carrying the Cross-beam, Jesus had hardly the strength now to carry his own body. He falls again. He must be picked up – cajoled, whipped again. How long can this go on? Here Jesus stands with the families of the dying who watch helpless as the condition of their loved ones deteriorate, and they can do nothing. He stands with the doctors and nurses and healthcare professionals who are using all their skills continually to monitor the ever-deteriorating body and the challenges it presents as it closes down – adjusting pain control, dealing with incontinence, watching for bed-sores. How long can this go on? Who knows? We sometimes find ourselves willing our loved ones to go – because we wonder how long can WE go on? Jesus’s hand is on our shoulder, too.

VIII – THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM WEEP

Were the women weeping out of pity for Jesus – or because, as is sometimes thought, they were professional mourners, paid to weep. Paid? By whom? Who would pay them to weep for Jesus? Perhaps they weep because they see too late who He is? Jesus tells them not to weep for him, but for themselves, and for their children. Learn from this, he seems to say. Get a grip. Too late now for ‘Woe is me’ or ‘If only....’ Here, at this station, Jesus stands with those who watch with regret. If only I’d been to visit him more often. If only we’d not argued all those years ago. If only I hadn’t been do damned pig-headed. If only I could say I’m sorry, and she could hear me say it. Here Jesus reminds us that life is too short – and sometimes death is too brutal and too swift. Don’t weep – go to him now – tell him you love him. Tell her you’re sorry. And learn – change – grow – redeem....

IX – JESUS FALLS THE THIRD TIME

Again? Just at the summit of Calvary, Jesus falls again. There must have been those who’d hoped that perhaps his heart had given way – or a stroke – some act of mercy on God’s behalf. The kind breath of Death – an opportunistic illness claiming what the nails were crying out for. Why can’t he just go? Why can’t she just let loose her grip on life. God, she’s stubborn. Why don’t you just die? Here Jesus stands with those who, out of despair – no, out of the deepest love

for their loved one, cry out fervently for the suffering to stop, and who allow themselves to be wracked with guilt for feeling such a thing. At this station, we all fall – it's too much for us, and we want the end to come sooner than it wants to itself. For all the right reasons.

X – JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

In his culture and tradition, nakedness is a shame, a way to ridicule. The passage of time, and artistic licence, has always granted Jesus the dignity of a loin cloth – the Romans would hardly have bothered with such niceties. They held him up to ridicule, laughed at his vulnerability, bartered for his robe. Cancer strips us of our dignity, of our looks. MND strips us of our faculties, of our ability even to breathe. Here Jesus stands with those who feel stripped of their humanity and lends them his own. In the nurse who doesn't call the patient Dolly, but Miss Riley, because Dolly Riley has always been *Miss* Riley, during all those years as a primary school teacher. In the Chaplain who sits and holds her hand for an hour or two, and prays with her, because she has no-one else to do it for her. In the volunteer who makes-up her face just the way she likes. Ready to meet her God. Looking her best.

XI – JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

We can't imagine the pain of it, can we? The tearing of flesh, the severing of tendons, the screaming pain. The cost of it all – the final, unbearable reality of what crossed our minds at the first station – the words of the consultant finally made real. We wince, every time we read about the hammering of the nails. And we are helpless. Here Jesus stands alongside those who work day by day, year by year, to bring about the day when the nails can hold no more fear, when they can pin us down no longer with their biting. Here Jesus stands with the researchers, the pioneers, the laboratory technicians, the experimenters, the trials specialists – those who give themselves to defeat the nails, and the spear, and the thorns – the mutating cells and the uncontrollable virus...

XII – JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

This is it. The moment. The nurses have done all they can now. All their work, all the doctors' expertise, has brought us to this moment. There is peace and healing in the air. The Doctor is delivering its regular intravenous dose of morphine, just a little bit more today than yesterday, and a whole lot more than last week. There is no pain, no anything. Dad is there on one side of the bed, her sons on the other. She is slipping away. They are all holding her hands, soothing her brow, telling her they love her, that it's OK to go now. She has done her best for them, and they assure her they'll be OK. She knows they are there. It's OK to go now. Go now. Go.

Here Jesus is with the dying soul – at last – when so often he might have seemed so distant - here he is – holding out his arms and welcoming. Come here, little one. You've done well. I'm proud of you. They are proud of you. Rest now. Dry your tears – they'll be along when it's time. Now look who I've got here for you.... do you recognise them?

XIII – JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS

It's all over. Now the rituals begin. Mary cradles her son in her lap again – Michelangelo's Pieta in St Peter's Basilica shows us how it might have been. In the quiet of the hospice room, we know he's gone, but we still wait with him. He looks peaceful now, someone says. Look – no pain on his face, no anxiety, no laboured breathing. Peace. Calm. Death. It's him – but it's not him. He's gone – the nurse opened the window to let him go out! Now is the time of washing, anointing, wrapping.

Here Joseph of Arimathea stands with the Funeral Directors who, like he did, come to take the body away. They are human too – so often, too often, seen as cold and objective, but they feel the weight of loss as they care for someone's child, someone's parent, someone's lover. Here Mary Magdalene stands with the embalmer, the make-up specialist, those who – like she did – prepare the body for burial.

XIV – JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

Waiting now. For eternity? Or for Sunday morning? Where is that tomb, anyway? Probably gone now. Several feet under the ground that has built up over it during two thousand years. Perhaps it's under the King David Hotel – or part of the foundations of the Knesset. Does it matter? Maybe not now. To the disciples it did, and to the Marys, and to Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. And maybe even to the soldiers who were supposed to guard it. They needed somewhere to go to, to run to. To touch. Take flowers. Roll away the stone – or clean it up a bit. Add a name and a date. See that space – that's where my name's going when my time comes.

Here Jesus stands with the Crematorium staff, the calligraphers who update the Memorial Books, the stone masons, the groundsmen, the providers of the empty plastic milk-containers without which we couldn't refresh the flower pots with water from the municipal taps. Without whom we couldn't remember. Not properly.

DO THIS..... IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME

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