

Our Life- A Journey through the Stations

Last Easter was unlike any other in memory: no hymns, no bells, no flowers, no dove cross. We had to make the best of the beauties of spring outside our windows, worshipping in online services and savoring images of those we hold dear on our computer screens. When it came and went, I realized that I had been unknowingly hoping that Easter really would bring “new life.” Or rather a return to our old, pre-lockdown lives. Perhaps some certainty about how and when this isolation would end. Some signal that we were doing the right things and would be “easing restrictions” soon.

From one year later, a mere three weeks in lockdown feels laughable. How could we have known the months of isolation and grief that lie ahead? Among moments of brightness, levity, and faith in our fellow human, it felt like the darkness of lent stayed with us. We have had to look inequality and loss in the face. And while we are in a better and more hopeful place now, the full light of Easter still has yet to shine.

In the quiet of my Easter Monday morning last year, I was looking at images and listening to the story of Christ moving through “the stations of the cross,” a journey reflected in our walk through life. I heard a clear message in Christ’s handling of his stations of the cross. Struggle is inevitable. We will all face our own trials, and there is triumph to be found in how we approach them.

As a psychologist, I am honored by the chance to be with others in their painful moments. I have seen people of every faith and background walking through life’s challenges with courage. I am impressed by the ways in which they show strength. I am encouraged by their ability to find a way through even the darkest of times. I am humbled by their faith in me to be present with them on their journey. Just as I find a path to resilience in their journeys, so do I find a message of faith and perseverance in Christ’s journey through the stations.

I: JUDGMENT

We are all at times judged unfairly by others. Sometimes with bigger consequences than others. It can feel like an injustice to have a partial truth used against us. It can hurt when people don’t see the real us, or make assumptions that miss our true intentions. When we feel judged, can we recognize the inevitability of mistakes, and instead see the humanity and infallibility behind others’ blind spots? Can we also own up to those moments when we turn a judgmental eye toward others?

II: TAKE UP OUR CROSS

Christ reminds us that we do have a choice in facing our hardships, in bearing our crosses: we can decide HOW we carry it. What will our attitude be? How will others see us handling our burdens? How will we frame them for ourselves? Can we claim the lesson we learn, the strength we build, or the courage we show? How do we carry it with dignity, acknowledging our sacrifice without creating a hard exterior?

III: OUR FIRST FALL

It is inevitable that we fall. Even the strongest backs give way when given a heavy burden to bear. We often contribute to our own weakness: lack of care, lack of nourishment, lack of support, lack of perspective. It drains our lifeblood. The way is long and there is often much ground yet to cover. At some point, our bodies may falter and our minds may feel weak and overwhelmed. Where do we find the strength to get up? Where do we find the sustenance to continue to move forward?

IV: MEETING OUR MOTHER

At every age, we need people in our lives who provide love, support, and encouragement. We are blessed if those people can be there for and with us in truly difficult times. When we have to walk alone, it feels so much darker. Sometimes, all we need is someone to show up as a compassionate presence, assuring us that we are not alone. We never stop needing to be seen, heard, and loved. Can we find those blessed people in our lives who offer us care? Can we accept care when it is given? When we receive it, we are better able to be that hopeful presence for others on the path.

V: FRIENDS ALONG THE WAY

If we are very fortunate, there may be people in our lives who help us to carry our burdens. They see us, in all our struggles and weakness, and instead of running the other way, they walk with us and offer help in some way. How can we stay open to moments when we need help and when we can offer help to others?

VI: KINDNESS OF STRANGERS

Even those we may not know well can offer us kindness. No living being is an island. Our very existence is an interconnected web. We are intricately tied to our human family, to all God's creatures and to the earth itself. Our very existence relies on grace from so many. We also have the opportunity to offer compassion to those we meet along our way. We can only pray our actions may help someone to continue on their journey, refreshed and renewed. How can we stay present to opportunities for small acts of kindness? And can we believe in the profound impact that these may have on the lives of others?

VII: PAIN

Pain is one of the sad realities of human life-physical, mental, emotional. It can cause us to stumble and fall. When pain arises and we resist, it can be a roadblock to continuing on our journey, to finding a place of value and meaning. Pain can be brutal, but it is often our struggle that overwhelms our ability to appreciate our contributions or find true connection in relationships. Despite our determination and hope, pain can strike us down and make us feel foolish. It also obscures the road ahead, so that we can see only the ground beneath us and the humiliation of our fall. Worse yet, we may get stuck looking behind us, trying in vain to discover what caused us to trip, what brought us to this low point. Looking back leaves us mired in regret. In these moments, can we find acceptance, offer self-compassion, and work

toward surrender? Paradoxically, it is these qualities, rather than brute strength, that help us to rise up and forge on.

VIII: COMFORTING others

It is amazing how in our suffering, we often find comfort in easing the pain of others. In fact, it is often our own difficult experiences that plant the seeds of empathy and understanding; that allow us to be truly present and compassionate with another's struggle. Humans are wired to deeply identify with others. Can we remember that are all in this together, and that there is strength to be gained from solidarity? How can we use compassionate action and connection to overcome obstacles and continue forward together?

IX: WEAKNESS-THE THIRD FALL

We all grow weary as we are weighed down, drained by life's struggles big and small. At times, we may be surprised to find that we have fallen and are on the ground. Can we tune in to our weakness, acknowledging where it shows up in our lives, in our minds, in our thoughts, in our emotions, in our bodies? By shining a light on our darker places, can we see ourselves with more balance. From that place of acceptance, can we access our strength, our persistence, our fortitude? When we can see those in ourselves, we may be freed to move forward on our path. It is getting up and moving forward with dignity and determination, not our falls, that ultimately define who we are.

X: STRIPPED BARE: VULNERABILITY AND HUMILIATION

Thankfully, most of us will never be convicted at a sham trial, sentenced to death, and then subjected to public mocking and flogging. But we have all likely felt the stinging barbs of humiliation and the rising heat of shame. This can happen in response to the activation of old wounds, to mistakes we have made, or to a betrayal by someone we trust. Each time, they leave us reeling. How can we follow Christ's example and rely not on aggression, withdrawal, or placating to get through, but rather on the appreciation of our own inherent worthiness? When we see and claim our worthiness, we are able to rise again.

XI: SUBMISSION-Nailed to the Cross

At what point in our lives do we recognize inevitability and allow ourselves to submit? So often we can forget that struggling will only make things harder. And yet that instinct is so powerful, so ingrained, that we often do not even recognize that we are resisting. The idea of letting go, accepting, or releasing can often seem to indicate that we must be "at peace" with our situation. Would it make sense for us to be at peace with injustice, oppression, harmful actions? No-but when we let go of resistance, it increases our ability to be aware, which may provide us with enough space to see and take the next step forward.

XII: DEATH

Inevitable for all humans, and yet universally avoided and denied. We all find ways, big and small, to divert our attention, to make ourselves indispensable, to control the output of our lives. Yet connecting with something bigger than ourselves is the true path to longevity and

immortality. Making a lasting contribution, leaving the world a better place, passing on some wisdom can all help to expand the reach of our lives beyond our time here on earth. Through Easter, we are reminded that death is a reality and that Christ's resurrection holds the power to alter our fate.

It can be hard to look at the agony of Christ's walk up to Golgatha. But in those early days of the pandemic and lock down, I found a message of hope in them. Jesus had faced our human pain and heartaches, and handled them with grace and wisdom. In our life journey, we can seek to follow his example.