



Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.' Matthew 16.24,25

Stations Of the Cross with sonnets by Malcolm Guite

I Jesus is condemned to death

Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, 'We heard him say, "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands".' But even on this point their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?' But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' Jesus said, 'I am; and "you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power", and "coming with the clouds of heaven".' Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, 'Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?' All of them condemned him as deserving death.

Pilate asked them, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him!' So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified. Mark 14.55-64/Mark 15.14,15

The very air that Pilate breathes, the voice
With which he speaks in judgment, all his
powers
Of perception and discrimination, choice,
Decision, all his years, his days and hours,
His consciousness of self, his every sense,
Are given by this prisoner, freely given.
The man who stands there making no defence,
Is God. His hands are tied, His heart is open.
And he bears Pilate's heart in his and feels
That crushing weight of wasted life. He lifts
It up in silent love. He lifts and heals.
He gives himself again with all his gifts
Into our hands. As Pilate turns away
A door swings open. This is judgment day.

II Jesus is given his cross

And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. Mark 15:17-.20

He gives himself again with all his gifts
And now we give him something in return.
He gave the earth that bears, the air that lifts,
Water to cleanse and cool, fire to burn,
And from these elements he forged the iron,
From strands of life he wove the growing wood,
He made the stones that pave the roads of Zion
He saw it all and saw that it is good.
We took his iron to edge an axe's blade,
We took the axe and laid it to the tree,
We made a cross of all that he has made,
And laid it on the one who made us free.
Now he receives again and lifts on high
The gifts he gave and we have turned awry.

III Jesus falls the first time

He made the stones that pave the roads of Zion
And well he knows the path we make him
tread

He met the devil as a roaring lion
And still refused to turn these stones to bread,
Choosing instead, as Love will always choose,
This darker path into the heart of pain.
And now he falls upon the stones that bruise
The flesh, that break and scrape the tender
skin.

He and the earth he made were never closer,
Divinity and dust come face to face.
We flinch back from his *via dolorosa**, (**way of suffering*)

He sets his face like flint and takes our place,
Staggers beneath the black weight of us all
And falls with us that he might break our fall.

IV Jesus meets His Mother

Simon blessed them and said to Mary his mother: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed". And his mother kept all these things in her heart. Luke. 2:34-35,51

This darker path into the heart of pain
Was also hers whose love enfolded him
In flesh and wove him in her womb. Again
The sword is piercing. She, who cradled him
And gentled and protected her young son
Must stand and watch the cruelty that mars
Her maiden making. Waves of pain that stun
And sicken pass across his face and hers
As their eyes meet. Now she enfolds the world
He loves in prayer; the mothers of the
disappeared
Who know her pain,
all bodies bowed and curled
In desperation on this road of tears,
All the grief-stricken in their last despair,
Are folded in the mantle of her prayer.

V Simon of Cyrene carries the cross

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the
country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of
Alexander and Rufus. Mark 15.21

In desperation on this road of tears
Bystanders and bypassers turn away
In other's pain we face our own worst fears
And turn our backs to keep those fears at bay
Unless we are compelled as this man was
By force of arms or force of circumstance
To face and feel and carry someone's cross
In Love's full glare and not his backward
glance.
So Simon, no disciple, still fulfilled
The calling: 'take the cross and follow me'.
By accident his life was stalled and stilled
Becoming all he was compelled to be.
Make me, like him, your pressed man and your
priest,
Your alter Christus, burdened and released.

VI Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

"I say to you, whatever you did for one of these brothers of
mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:14

Bystanders and bypassers turn away
And wipe his image from their memory
She keeps her station. She is here to stay
And stem the flow. She is the reliquary
Of his last look on her. The bloody sweat
And salt tears of his love are soaking through
The folds of her devotion and the wet
folds of her handkerchief, like the dew

Of morning, like a softening rain of grace.
Because she wiped the grime from off his skin,
And glimpsed the godhead in his human face
Whose hidden image we all bear within,
Through all our veils and shrouds of daily pain
The face of god is shining once again.

VII Jesus falls the second time

"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in
weakness." II Corinthians 12:9

Through all our veils and shrouds of daily pain,
Through our bruised bruises and re-opened
scars,
He falls and stumbles with us, hurt again
When we are hurt again. With us he bears
The cruel repetitions of our cruelty;
The beatings of already beaten men,
The second rounds of torture, the futility
Of all unheeded pleading, every scream in vain.
And by this fall he finds the fallen souls
Who passed a first, but failed a second trial,
The souls who thought their faith would hold
them whole
And found it only held them for a while.
Be with us when the road is twice as long
As we can bear. By weakness make us strong.

VIII Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

A great number of the people followed him, and among them
were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him.
But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do
not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your
children...' Luke 23.27-31

He falls and stumbles with us, hurt again
But still he holds the road and looks in love
On all of us who look on him. Our pain
As close to him as his. These women move
Compassion in him as he does in them.
He asks us both to weep and not to weep.
Women of Gaza and Jerusalem,
Women of every nation where the deep
Wounds of memory divide the land
And lives of all your children, where the mines
Of all our wars are sown: Afghanistan ,
Iraq, the Cote d'Ivoire... he reads the signs
And weeps with you and with you he will stay
Until the day he wipes your tears away.

IX Jesus falls the third time

“For nothing will be impossible with God.” Luke 1:37

He weeps with you and with you
he will stay
When all your staying power has run out
You can't go on, you go on anyway.
He stumbles just beside you when the doubt
That always haunts you, cuts you down at last
And takes away the hope that drove you on.
This is the third fall and it hurts the worst
This long descent through darkness to
depression
From which there seems no rising and no will
To rise, or breathe or bear your own heart beat.
Twice you survived; this third will surely kill,
And you could almost wish for that defeat
Except that in the cold hell where you freeze
You find your God beside you on his knees.

X Jesus is stripped of His garments

“I can count all my bones. They stare at me and gloat; they
divide my garments among them; for my clothing they cast lots.”
Psalm 22:18-19

You can't go on, you go on anyway
He goes with you, his cradle to your grave.
Now is the time to loosen, cast away
The useless weight of everything but love
For he began his letting go before,
Before the worlds for which he dies were made,
Emptied himself, became one of the poor,
To make you rich in him and unafraid.
See as they strip the robe from off his back
They strip away your own defences too
Now you could lose it all and never lack
Now you can see
what naked Love can do
Let go these bonds beneath whose weight you
bow
His stripping strips you both for action now

XI Crucifixion: Jesus is nailed to the cross

“When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified
him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his
left. Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, they know not what
they do.’” Luke 23:33-34

See, as they strip the robe from off his back
And spread his arms and nail them to the cross,
The dark nails pierce him and the sky turns
black,
And love is firmly fastened onto loss.
But here a pure change happens. On this tree
Loss becomes gain, death opens into birth.
Here wounding heals and fastening makes free
Earth breathes in heaven, heaven roots in
earth.
And here we see the length, the breadth, the
height
Where love and hatred meet and love stays
true
Where sin meets grace and darkness turns to
light
We see what love can bear and be and do,
And here our saviour calls us to his side
His love is free, his arms are open wide.

XII Jesus dies on the cross

“Then Jesus, with a loud cry, gave his last breath. At that
moment the Temple curtain ripped right down the middle.
When the Roman captain standing guard in front of him saw that
he had quit breathing, he said, ‘This has to be the Son of God!’”
Mark 15:39

The dark nails pierce him and the sky turns
black
We watch him as he labours to draw breath
He takes our breath away to give it back,
Return it to its birth through his slow death.
We hear him struggle breathing through the
pain
Who once breathed out his spirit on the deep,
Who formed us when he mixed the dust with
rain
And drew us into consciousness from sleep.
His spirit and his life he breathes in all
Mantles his world in his one atmosphere
And now he comes to breathe beneath the pall
Of our pollutions, draw our injured air
To cleanse it and renew.
His final breath Breathes us,
and bears us through the gates of death.

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