

Stations of the Cross: Overcoming Racism

Our outdoor Stations of the Cross installation provides both a traditional journey with Stations of the Cross joined with a contemplative exploration of the sin of racism. We hope this outdoor Stations experience can offer some insights from our recent book study of Caste which we are exploring in community with Ebenezer Baptist Church. The parishioners of St. Luke's have committed individually and collectively to examining the ways in which racism affects our lives, the lives of each other, and the world around us.

As you walk through and consider each of the fourteen stations, remember that our Baptismal Covenant calls on us to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

People in our day suffer unjustly simply because of the color of their skin or their national origin. Let us acknowledge the sin of racism and work to combat it in our social structures, our institutions, and our hearts.

OPENING PRAYER

Creator of all, we pray for healing to address the persistent sin of racism, which is the rejection of the full humanity of your children, and the talents and potential you have given them. We pray for the grace to recognize the systems that do not support the dignity of every person, that do not promote respect for those who are seen as other, who bear the legacy of centuries of discrimination, fear, and violence. Give us eyes to see how the past has shaped the complex present.

We pray for social structures in which all your children can grow up without fear, in security and dignity, with access to health care and a quality education that will allow them to develop their gifts.

Empower us to create a new way forward, with a new sense of community that embraces and celebrates the rich diversity of all people. Help us to live out your call to combat racism and hatred. Show us how to live in compassionate solidarity, supported by your grace and your love. We ask this through Christ, our Savior. *Amen.*

FIRST STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: "Why?" Pilate asked. "What crime has he committed?" But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them, and, after having Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified. (*Mark 15:14-15*)

Reflection: An innocent man is about to be killed, and the laws of the land will not protect him. A crowd has gathered – not to protest, but to cheer. Government leaders are indifferent, more concerned about politics than justice.

Racism leads to many forms of injustice: sometimes death, sometimes imprisonment, sometimes closed doors and lost opportunities. We may not be in a crowd cheering the evil deed, but are we indifferent? It is easy to remain silent even though we may have an opportunity to speak up. Do we object to an inappropriate "joke"? Do we advocate for justice when we have access to people in power? Do we work to open doors in the workplace? Will we be like Pilate and the crowd, or will we use our opportunities to create opportunities for others?

Prayer: Let us pray.

Christ Jesus, you were a victim of injustice, condemned by those who had the power to save you and ignored by those who might have spoken up on your behalf. Embolden us to use the opportunities we have to speak out against the injustices around us, knowing that you desire justice for all God's people. *Amen.*

SECOND STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: So they took Jesus, carrying his own cross, to what is called the Place of the Skull—in Hebrew, "Golgotha." (*John 19:17*)

Pilate said, "So you're a King?" Jesus replied, "You say I'm a King. I was born and came into the world for one purpose—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who seeks the truth hears my voice." "Truth? What is truth?" asked Pilate. With that, Pilate went outside and spoke to the people. "I find no guilt in him," he said. (*John 18:37-38*)

Reflection: Pilate could have taken a different approach. But when Jesus said to Pilate, "Everyone who seeks the truth hears my voice," Pilate replied dismissively, "What is truth?" In that retort, Pilate embodied the attitude that leads to so much discrimination and injustice in every age.

Too often, we do not want to know the truth. We dismiss the daily discrimination faced by people of color – the disparaging looks, the job interviews that never materialize, the apartments that are suddenly no longer available, the lower-quality educational opportunities, the disproportionate police stops, the discriminatory sentencing rates. It is easier to think that our society is color-blind and that everyone has an equal chance or that discrimination is merely an occasional aberration rather than a daily reality. The truth, however, is that racism and caste are endemic parts of life in our culture.

Prayer: Let us pray.

Jesus, grant us courage to acknowledge the truth with honesty. The injustices caused by racism and caste are far too common and impose heavy crosses on our brothers and sisters. Lift our voices to cry out and speak the truth about the magnitude of the injustices they face. *Amen.*

THIRD STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: Yet you bore our illnesses and carried our suffering. Though treated harshly, you bore it humbly and never opened your mouth. Like a lamb being led to slaughter, or a sheep before shearers, you were silent and never opened your mouth. (Isaiah 53:4a,7)

Reflection: Jesus accepted his cross and carried it valiantly despite his weakened state. But he could not bear up under the load. He fell.

Racism imposes heavy burdens, too: burdens of physical and psychological violence, burdens of oppressive language and logics, the unfair weight of racist symbols and stereotypes, the heavy load of xenophobic policies and unjust structures. Will we leave our brothers and sisters to bear the cross of racism alone? Or will we step out in solidarity and accompany them as they travel their own “way of the cross”?

Prayer: Let us pray.

Jesus, the cross of injustice is heavy. Grant us courage to not to dismiss it as just “the way things are,” but rather to acknowledge the crosses others must bear because some see them as different. Inspire us to seek ways to walk beside all your people in their journey. *Amen.*

FOURTH STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, the mother, "This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that is rejected, so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare. And a sword will pierce your heart as well." Mary stored these things in her heart. (Luke 2:34-35,51)

Reflection: Mary was cautioned from the beginning that the blessing of bearing Jesus would come with a cost. The joys and the sorrows were mingled in her unflinching heart.

A mother's pain is no different in communities of color today. When her child suffers, she suffers. When her child is deprived of opportunity, she aches. When her child is beaten, she nurses the wounds. And when her child is murdered, she identifies the body at the morgue.

But the pain often begins long before then. Mothers of black children launch them toward independence with "the Talk" about how to survive a traffic stop. Undocumented immigrant mothers go to work every day with contingency plans for who will care for their children if they are detained or deported.

Jesus looked into the eyes of his mother and felt her pain. How can we be like him and stand with the mothers who store up so much grief and anxiety in their tender hearts?

Prayer: Let us pray.

Jesus, you could not relieve your mother's fears, yet you did acknowledge her pain. Give us courage to stand with anxious and grieving mothers and work to end the injustices that besiege your children. *Amen.*

FIFTH STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: A passerby named Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was coming in from the fields. The soldiers pressed him into service to carry Jesus' cross. (Mark 15:21)

Reflection: Simon of Cyrene did not volunteer to help Jesus. But his very presence meant that Jesus was not totally alone. He had at least one person by his side as he struggled to drag his cross up the hill.

What could be lonelier than facing racism on your own? It is bad enough that some people experience injustices inflicted on them, that they hear insults hurled at them. And yet, when we have the opportunity to provide comfort and presence we don't always do so, leaving the person or people to fend for themselves, rather than standing with them.

Although Simon did not have a choice but to help carry Jesus's cross, we do. We can overlook a racist comment, or we can challenge it and explain why it perpetuates language of sin. We can keep our distance, or we can reach out to connect with someone whose experience is different than our own. We can stay in our own lanes, or we can work to lift our society to a higher place.

Prayer: Let us pray.

God, you have arranged the universe so that one person's action can help ease the burden of another. Embolden us to reach out and to speak out, and give us strength to share in bearing together the weight of our crosses.
Amen.

SIXTH STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: You had no stately form or majesty to make us look at you, there was no beauty to attract us. You were rejected and despised by all; you know suffering intimately, and you are acquainted with sickness. When we saw you, we turned our faces away; we despised you and did not value you. (Isaiah 53:2b-3)

Reflection: Crowned with thorns and then struck repeatedly on the head with a reed, covered with blood, sweat, and dust, Jesus's face on that day would have been difficult to behold. Many would have turned away. Yet a woman pushed forward and offered Jesus her veil to wipe his face.

How do you react when you see someone who is suffering unjustly? The human tendency is to avoid eye contact, to walk quickly away. In short, we do not get involved which allows the injustice to continue.

Yet this woman chose to get involved. She saw the suffering of another person and reached out to help – at the risk of drawing attention to herself.

Prayer: Let us pray.

Jesus, so many of our brothers and sisters suffer daily from the injustice of racism. Move us from the comfort of the crowd towards acts of courage. Make us uncomfortable in our inaction towards those who are treated differently and give us courage to show your love to all God's people.
Amen.

SEVENTH STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: Jesus replied, "There was a traveler going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, who fell prey to robbers. The traveler was beaten, stripped naked, and left half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road; the priest saw the traveler lying beside the road, but passed by on the other side. Likewise there was a Levite who came the same way; this one, too, saw the afflicted traveler and passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was taking the same road, also came upon the traveler and [was] filled with compassion." (Luke 10:30-33)

Reflection: Jesus fell a second time under the weight of the cross. He suffered immensely for his willingness to identify with our humanity. Undoubtedly, some who saw him were quick to look down on him unsympathetically, as being a criminal.

One of the signs of prejudice is to separate ourselves from those we deem unworthy or inferior. Applying such biased thinking to whole groups is a signal that racism has infected our thinking – like the hostility between Samaritans and the Jews in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. As soon as we start mentally separating people based on racial or ethnic stereotypes, we judge falsely and break the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Prayer: Let us pray.

God of wisdom, too often we succumb to biased thinking without even being aware of it. You call us into community with all your people, each reflecting their own unique dignity. Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of fellowship and show us your presence in those who differ most from us.
Amen.

EIGHTH STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: A large crowd was following, many of them women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. At one point, Jesus turned to these women and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me! Weep rather for yourselves and for your children!" (Luke 23:27-28)

Reflection: The women of Jerusalem were able to see beyond themselves and grieve the injustice done to Jesus.

When we see injustices caused by racism, how do we react? Do we care? Do we weep? For those most at risk, racism is a daily source of anxiety and anguish. For others, it takes an intentional decision to care. The women of Jerusalem made Jesus's cause their own. Will we show the same concern?

The next time a person of color is killed – like Trayvon, Eric, Michael, Tamir, Philando, George, Brianna, Ahmaud, or Rayshard – how will we join the affected communities in saying that these lives are intrinsically valuable? When the next synagogue or mosque is attacked, how will we speak out? Will we insist that the racism that affects anyone is a concern for all? Or will we ignore it when it has not happened in our community? For whom shall we weep?

Prayer: Let us pray.

Jesus, you spoke out against injustice wherever it occurred. Grant us deliverance from narrowness of sight to see the injustices that affect those outside our own communities. Strengthen a spirit of compassion among us and embolden us to be a clanging cymbal that calls for justice and wholeness in your communities wherever injustice is found. *Amen.*

NINTH STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: “You lay impossible burdens on the people, but won't lift a finger to lighten them. Woe to you!” (Luke 11:46b-47a)

Reflection: Jesus is weighed down by the weight of the cross, as though bearing the sins of the whole world.

Racism is a cross most often borne by people of color, but it is not just an individual burden. It has community-wide impacts. Our nation's social structures and political institutions maintain policies and practices that magnify the sufferings of communities of color. As a result, systemic racism persists.

Tragedies such as the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, usually fall most heavily on minority communities. Toxic waste sites and industrial facilities that pollute the water and air are more likely to be located near communities of color. Low-income people of color are hit hardest by hurricanes like Katrina and Harvey and find it hardest to recover. Children of color suffer lead poisoning disproportionately. Maternal mortality rates among African American women remain three times higher than that of whites. Differences in the distribution of educational resources continue to disadvantage people of color, particularly African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. Our social structures have allowed patterns of systemic racism to persist. We must work to change these patterns.

Prayer: Let us pray.

Jesus, just as you flipped over the tables in the temple, you call us to be agents of change to transform our social and economic structures that perpetuate racism. Give us courage to acknowledge the roots of racial injustice and the persistence to work to change them. *Amen.*

TENTH STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: They stripped off his clothes.... (Mt 27:28)

Reflection: Part of the humiliation of crucifixion was that the prisoner was stripped naked, left totally exposed. This was done in an attempt to deny the condemned person's dignity.

Racism also attempts to strip others of their dignity. While our human dignity is an indelible gift from God, racist attitudes and actions undermine the human dignity of the oppressor as well as the oppressed. Our nation's history is tarnished with incidents designed to strip away the dignity of others: the enslavement of African Americans and their continued oppression through systemic racism, disenfranchisement and mistreatment of Native Americans, laws designed to exclude the Chinese, internment of the Japanese in camps during WWII, as well as ongoing racist acts and discrimination against Asians and Asian-Americans, and those of Hispanic descent. These patterns of racism have flourished in part because "good" people too often have remained silent.

When racism flourishes, we are all implicated – especially in a democracy. We are called to transform our society with God's love. Yet our society still allows some to be stripped of their dignity. As members of the Body of Christ, our dignity is intertwined with everyone's. How can we not stand humiliated before the cross, knowing that we have failed to adequately protect the dignity of all our brothers and sisters?

Prayer: Let us pray.

Jesus, in becoming human you sanctified the dignity of all humanity. Grant us clarity of heart to honor the dignity of every person and inspire us to transform our social structures so they promote dignity for all. *Amen.*

ELEVENTH STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: But it was for our offenses that you were pierced, for our sins that you were crushed; upon you lies a chastening that brings us wholeness, and through your wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

Reflection: Jesus sacrificed himself on the cross so that we might be healed of all that separates us from God and each other. Each person must turn away from habits and patterns of sin in order to be transformed.

It is easy to recognize an individual sin of racism when someone violates justice or fails to extend the love of Christ to others. But even people who want to live justly cannot escape the taint of racism. When our social structures uphold injustice and perpetuate the effects of racism, we all become accomplices to that injustice, whether or not intentionally. The structures of sin in our own society unfairly deprive some of their basic human rights. When we fail to speak out against these structures and reform them, our complicity cannot be ignored.

Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world. Just as our sinful acts must be forgiven at the cross, so too our failures to act when it was our duty to act must be forgiven at the cross. Racism and the structures of systemic racism that still bedevil us must be confessed and transformed by our loving Savior.

Prayer: Let us pray.

Savior, grant us courage to acknowledge the sins we have committed and challenge us to give voice to the sins of our omission that allow injustice to persist. Embolden us to stand up to the structures of sin and be a people who are impassioned for the work of justice. *Amen.*

TWELFTH STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: At three, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Then Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. The centurion who stood guard over Jesus, seeing how he died, declared, "Clearly, this was God's Own!" (Mark 15:34,37,39)

(Stand or sit for a minute in silence.)

Reflection: Jesus expressed the feeling of abandonment often experienced by those who are unjustly treated. The centurion recognized the injustice that had taken place and testified to the truth.

We are called to be united with those who suffer injustice. Their pain should be our pain. Like that centurion, we should be the ones affirming the worth of those rejected by others. How can we acknowledge injustice and see others in a new way, connect with them and testify to their pain?

An examination of conscience might help: How am I taking time to learn the stories of past oppression? How am I actively seeking to listen to the cries of our brothers and sisters who experience racism and rejection today? How am I working to change unjust policies? What attitudes in myself that devalue or cast suspicion on others do I need to root out? How am I taking intentional steps to welcome the stranger, socialize with people from other communities, and learn about people from other cultures, races, and backgrounds?

Prayer: Let us pray.

Jesus, Son of God, even in the silence and isolation of our hearts, you are with us. Remind us to reach out in solidarity to those who are suffering, including those who are experiencing isolation because of the sin of racism. Lead our hearts to proximity with those who are in pain, and give us

courage to be transformed by our acknowledgement of the depths of pain that we ourselves inflict. *Amen.*

THIRTEENTH STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: A distinguished member of the Sanhedrin, Joseph from Arimathea, arrived. He was waiting for the reign of God, and he gathered up courage and sought an audience with Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. Then, having bought a linen shroud, Joseph took the body of Jesus down, wrapped him in the linen and laid him in a tomb which had been cut out of rock. (Mark 15:43,46a)

Reflection: In order to claim Jesus's body and give him a proper burial, Joseph of Arimathea sacrificed his own comfort and safety and risked angering the powers of his day. We need to dismantle the structures beholden to the sin of white supremacy that continue to exist, and we need to risk our own comfort and safety to do so.

We are called to be active participants in addressing racial injustice and becoming reconcilers, justice-makers and healers. This road isn't always straightforward. On this journey, we move around corners and double back into quadrants we have visited before, each time discovering new revelation and challenge.

Working to change economic and social policies is not easy. Like Joseph of Arimathea, we will need courage. But we cannot remain silent. We must engage with others in respectful conversations and take action to reform structures that perpetuate injustice.

Prayer: Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, by your death you took away the sting of death. Grant us your people so to follow in faith where you have led the way, demanding justice and lifting up the lowly. Give us the courage to transform ourselves, our church, our communities and our institutions as we continue your work of racial justice. *Amen.*

FOURTEENTH STATION

Opening Sentence: We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Scripture: Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in fresh linen and laid it in his own tomb, which had been hewn out of rock. Then Joseph rolled a huge stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away. (Mt 27:59-60)

Reflection: When the stone was rolled across the entrance to the tomb, marking with finality the apparent end of Jesus's life, all seemed lost. The hope of the world was gone. But the tomb was not the end of the story.

Racism, in all its ugly forms, is also not the end of the story. Jesus makes all things new. He can transform our hearts, and he can help us transform our social structures and institutions to remove the scourge of racism.

Before God we are one human race, and God desires that we dwell in harmony with one another. Consider the words of the prophet Micah: "Listen here, mortal: God has already made abundantly clear what "good" is, and what Yhwh needs from you: simply do justice, love kindness, and humbly walk with your God." (Micah 6:8). This is our task. Empowered by God's Spirit, we must humbly but fearlessly engage in the work of racial justice.

Prayer: Let us pray.

Jesus, you have bound us together in a common life. Increase our reverence for the commonality of the human race. Grant us new wisdom and determination to strive for justice and peace among all God's people until our knowledge of your love is made perfect in our love for all your people. *Amen.*

CLOSING PRAYER

For your household with its blessed diversity of races and ethnicities,

We give thanks, O God.

For your presence with those who suffer the pain of oppression because of racism,

We pray, O God.

For the courage and commitment of those who challenge injustice,

We give thanks, O God.

For your forgiveness for our denial and apathy when we have cooperated with powers of dominance and discrimination,

We pray, O God.

For ears to hear stereotyping in church and community, and the courage to name it,

We pray, O God.

For eyes to see exclusion in our lives and churches and for resolve to confront it,

We pray O God.

For minds to address what the conscience knows,

We pray, O God.

For hearts freed of cynicism and despair and renewed with hope,

We pray, O God.

For faith that acts on the certainty of your love for us and on your desire that we honor our differences and live in harmony,

We pray, O God.

We pray in fellowship with those from this time and beyond time who have witnessed to your call to community. We covenant with you and each other to be your instruments of justice and reconciliation in this time and in this place.

In the name of Christ, who is loving, just, and forgiving, we offer our prayer.
Amen.

Adapted from *Stations of the Cross: Overcoming Racism*: originally written by Tom Faletti, as prepared for St. Peter's Parish, Washington, DC, March 2019 and adapted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, March 2020.

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Other prayers sourced from:

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