



Stations of the Cross for Gaza

Following our dear Lord in the Way of the Cross,
as he journeys with the suffering people of Palestine

I

Jesus is condemned to death



A protestor slashes and spray-paints a portrait of Lord Balfour as a symbolic gesture against his historic role

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, 'Here is your King!' They cried out, 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!' Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but the emperor.' Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

(John 19: 13- 16)

In 1917, the Balfour Declaration declared Britain's support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, a statement issued with little regard for the life of the existing Palestinian community. The population of Palestine at that time was about 800,000: 730,000 Palestinian Arabs (650,000 Muslim; 80,000 Christian); and 60,000 Jews. The Declaration is considered to have paved the way for the establishment of the State of Israel.

Thorn-crowned God,
mocked and beaten,
standing vulnerable before Empire and the world;
your choices brought you here;
you chose love over hate and justice over coercion.
Your silent presence challenges the status quo.
We ask that those who use their power to destroy will not be indifferent,
and will encounter love and justice
so that peace with real security might come to all.

Through Jesus, the wounded healer, we pray. **Amen.**

II

Jesus takes up his Cross



Families flee in the Nakba of 1948

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 15:20)

In 1948, thousands of Palestinians were killed, or forced to flee from their homes, in what is known in Palestine as the Nakba, or Catastrophe. By the time that a final ceasefire had been established in 1949, Israel had acquired 78% of Palestine, from which it had expelled over 750,000 Palestinians, and more than 400 Palestinian villages had been erased.

Cross-carrying Christ,
burdened with the sin of the world,
embracing death so death may die;
we cry out in grief and pain for all those held hostage by hate,
in partnership with death,
and all whose every waking moment expects death.
Help them cling to the hope that death does not rule this world:
That God's justice will have the final word.

Through Love stronger than death. **Amen.**



Jesus falls the first time



Does this mean nothing to you that pass by? No one has ever had pain like mine, Pain that the Lord brought on me in the time of his anger.

(Lamentations 1:12)

On 7th October 2023, Hamas soldiers stormed communities along Israel's fence with Gaza, killing about 1,200 people and taking about 250 captives. Israel immediately began a massive campaign of air strikes on Gaza, followed by a ground invasion. Since then, more than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces.

Grounded God,
whose stumbling echoes our own,
We are dust and will return to dust.
As body-bags are buried hastily, while shells fall,
We witness suffering beyond our understanding.
May we continue to care and to cry out against injustice.
May we confess our sin and find forgiveness.
May those on their knees through no fault of their own
Rise to life

Through him who walked the way of the cross for Love's sake. **Amen.**

IV

Jesus meets his grieving Mother



Children lay soft toys at the door of the UK Foreign Office

Thus says the LORD:

A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more.

(Jeremiah 31:15)

Over 13,000 children have been killed in Gaza since the 7th of October, more than were killed globally in the previous four years of wars combined.

Mary in mourning,
shrouded in grief;
your bitter tears fall for all mourning mothers,
for all fathers who have buried a child
and all children orphaned in calamity.
May grief lead not to rage and vengeance
but to brave encounters with others also grieving
longing for a different co-existence.

In costly solidarity, we pray. **Amen.**

V

Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the Cross



When we justify, rationalize, and theologize the bombing of children, Jesus is under the rubble... Jesus is under the rubble. This is his manger. He is at home with the marginalized, the suffering, the oppressed, and displaced. This is his manger.

Munther Isaac, Christ under the Rubble

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)

The words of Revd Dr Munther Isaac, Palestinian Pastor, addressing Christians in the UK:

“So, I come here to the UK and I want to challenge the church here: if we truly seek justice and righteousness, in obedience to the commandment of Christ, we must have the courage to speak up and call things by name! This is not a conflict. Israel is not exercising its right for self-defence. Rather, Israel is the coloniser. Israel is a settler-colonial entity. They have displaced millions of Palestinians. Israel was built on the ruins of the people of Palestine. We live under apartheid. What is happening in Gaza is a genocide, it’s ethnic cleansing.”

Simon the stranger,
pressed into service to help carry the cross with Jesus;
how did it feel to shoulder that load, even for a brief time?
Suffering Saviour, help us to help one another.
Increase the kindness of strangers,
and enlarge all hearts with compassion
so that we might be made whole
even as we walk the way of suffering.

Through him who loves us, and gave himself for us. **Amen.**

Your face, Lord, do I seek. Hide not your face from me.

(Ps 27:8-9)

As world leaders, governments and corporations rushed to side with the oppressor, millions people around the world have been raising their voices in protest, demanding an end to this genocide and doing what they can to help Palestinians. There are campaigns to ban arms exports to Israel, and to boycott Israeli goods and services. In the UK, hundreds of thousands have marched in the streets calling for peace.

Wiping away tears and blood: A small gesture of compassion echoed a thousand times.

Woman of Jerusalem, you did what you could even though it was a small thing.

God of small things,

may we trust that each small act of kindness is meaningful:

A hand held, a tear wiped, a tree planted, a letter written.

Each gesture helps to set the banquet table.

Trustworthy God, help us to trust you. **Amen.**

VII

Jesus falls for the second time



Eman Al-Kholi, whose foot was amputated after being wounded in an Israeli bombing that killed her parents, at the European Hospital in Rafah, December 28, 2023

I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath; he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light. He has blocked my way with hewn stones, he has made my paths crooked. He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes.

(Lamentations. 3:1-2,9,16)

More than 1,000 children in Gaza have had one or both legs amputated because of Israeli attacks. Reports from IDF soldiers describe specifically targeting Palestinians' legs.

Fallen One,
down in the dust with the refuse;
you persevere in face of contempt and disdain.
We pray for all considered expendable.
We see you with them, in solidarity,
and we ask you to strengthen all those
who long to resist evil, but are not sure how.
We give thanks for those brave souls
who persist in human kindness at great personal cost.

Remember them, remember us, O God. **Amen.**

VIII

Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem



Hear, O women, the word of the LORD,
and let your ears receive the word of his mouth;
teach to your daughters a dirge,
and each to her neighbour a lament.

(Jeremiah 9:20)

Nearly 700,000 women and girls in Gaza have menstrual cycles, which they are trying to manage with little privacy or access to pads, toilets or clean water. There are more than 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza, and an average of 180 of them give birth every day, with little or no access to healthcare or medical supplies.

Encountering God,
who meets all who look for you,
we hold silence in face of horrendous suffering.
Comfort those who mourn,
heal those who are wounded,
lift those who have fallen and keep alight hope for a better future
where tears will be dried
and old men will rejoice and young women will stand tall
and all who call Jerusalem home will live together in peace.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

IX

Jesus falls for the third time



But at my stumbling they gathered in glee,
they gathered together against me;
ruffians whom I did not know
tore at me without ceasing.

(Psalm 35:15)

Since October an estimated 157,200 buildings have been damaged or destroyed. This is more than half of the buildings in Gaza. At least \$15 billion dollars will be needed to replace just the residential buildings that have been destroyed, and rebuilding will likely take decades.

Dust-bound Lord,
the voices of all beneath the rubble cry out for justice
their voices muffled by siren screams
and the thud of detonation.
There is a time to be silent and a time to speak.
You have forsworn the roar of the lion but is the silence of the lamb
enough?
The division is enough.
The suffering is enough.
The justification for oppression is more than enough.
Do we have to dig you out with our bare hands?

We wait, but not patiently, Lord. **Amen.**

X

Jesus is stripped of his garments



And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull), they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him there.

(Matthew. 27:33-36)

Horrifying images of Palestinian men stripped, bound and blindfolded, forced to kneel in the street have been widely circulated. Israel has systematically abducted, tortured, and executed Palestinian men under a blanket designation of ' Hamas terrorists', even as Palestinians identify their civilian loved ones from these photographs.

Stripped, naked, humiliated
under hostile gaze.

The soldiers, inured to the horror
in their callous matter-of-factness, gamble for your clothes.

○ Human One,
born with nothing and dying with nothing
you stand with all who are dehumanised and degraded.

May we see in each the naked glory of God. **Amen.**

XI

Jesus is nailed to the Cross



And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'
(Matthew 27:46)

Hind Rajab was a six-year-old Palestinian girl who was killed by the Israeli military, after being the sole survivor of Israeli tank fire on the vehicle she fled in with six relatives.

According to the Palestine Red Crescent Society, Israeli forces deliberately attacked the ambulance sent to rescue her, killing two medics.

Hind's story gained significant media coverage in February 2024, after her emergency 3-hour phone call with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society was released, in which she told the dispatcher, "I'm so scared, please come. Come take me. Please, will you come?"

What cross were you nailed to, Jesus?
The one meant to crush all opposition
and force fear into every heart?
Yet even on this instrument of torture,
between two criminals,
there was grace and humanity.
Your own pain did not exclude the Other.
May all those crucified today in the name of security
be named and recognized as children of God. **Amen.**

XII

Jesus dies on the Cross



A child collects spilled flour from the ground

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

(Matthew 27:50)

If the bombs don't kill children in Gaza, hunger might. 100% of the population of Gaza is hungry. On 29 February 2024, at least 118 people were killed and 760 injured after Israeli forces opened fire on civilians seeking food from aid trucks in Gaza City. Since this 'Flour massacre', several other similar events have been reported.

Humble God,
arms outstretched in embrace of the whole world;
as you died what was it the soldier saw in you
to call you 'good?'
When death is commonplace,
and safe places are targeted,
and whole families wiped out,
what difference does this death make?
You did not stay far off, O God,
and your sordid death elevates each life

And all for Love's sake. **Amen.**

XIII

Jesus is taken down from the Cross



“Two mothers watching over their sons. Same place in the world, Palestine, over 2000 years apart.” Dr Ahmed Haque

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths,
according to the burial custom of the Jews.

(John 19:40)

A mother cradles her adult son,
his broken body spilling across her lap.
She weeps and will not be consoled.
At that point history and ethnicity no longer matter:
All grief, all sorrow, born of love, is the same sharp sword.
Are destruction and salvation the same thing?
Sorrowing, Loving God, gather all your children.
Show mercy.
Bring healing and peace. **Amen.**

XIV

Jesus is laid in the tomb



Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

(John 19:41-42)

On December 23rd, Palestinian photojournalist Wissam Nassar wrote, "The martyr is buried on the asphalt, on the sidewalk, under the tree, in the market, and at home. Take off your shoes in Gaza, all roads are paved with martyrs."

The cemeteries are already full and more people are dying every day. A ground invasion of Rafah, where most of Gaza's population are sheltering, looms. Rumours of a ceasefire abound but are not fulfilled. The people of Palestine need our prayers, our action, our solidarity.

Linen-wrapped,
a body, limp and dead
you lay entombed
and the stone sealed the entrance.
This dead time, this transition time,
a threshold from death to life renewed.
Silent God, let us not rush on to glory;
help us linger with the knowledge that this seeming defeat
will vanquish the powers of destruction.
Help us hold on to hope and hear the whisper ~
of love which will be born anew.
And let our waiting be active.
In the name of God: Creator, Redeemer and ever-present Spirit. **Amen.**

Prayers adapted from those written by Muriel Pearson
for the Church of Scotland, 2024

Bible quotes are from the NRSV