

The Women of the Cross



Stations of the Cross
Good Friday
April 3, 2026 6 p.m.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church

stlukesdurham.org 1737 Hillandale Road
919 286 2273 Durham NC 27705

Stations of the Cross: The Women of the Cross

The congregation joins in the responses and prayers in bold.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God and Mother of us all. ***Amen.***

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Let us pray.

***Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.***

V. We will glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ:

R. ***In whom is our salvation, our life and resurrection.***

Let us pray.

Assist us mercifully with your help, O Lord God of our salvation, that we may enter with joy upon the contemplation of those mighty acts, whereby you have given us life and immortality; through Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

The procession starts at the first station.

I: JESUS IS CONDEMNED

V: Women are bound in blood with Christ.

R: *Jesus bleeds on the cross; blood is the cup of the New Covenant.*

Several of us gather at Pilate's house when we hear Jesus has been taken there. Some nearly faint when Pilate sentences him to be crucified. After they lead him away to be flogged, we settle in to wait.

Early on, there had been some tension between the women of Jerusalem and the Galilean women. But we soon discovered that our shared love for Jesus erased differences among us that had seemed important before. Mary, the woman called Magdalene, became my good friend. It is easy to see why Jesus so obviously loves her.

It is equally easy to see why Peter is jealous of her. None of the men appreciates women as much as Jesus does. It was that ease that gave me the courage to approach him that day near Capernaum. I had been bleeding for twelve long years. I had spent all my money on physicians, and still I bled. I had just about lost hope.

But then I heard of the wonders Jesus worked. He was in great demand, so I thought, "I won't bother him. If I can just touch his clothes, I know I will be well again."

So I came up behind him in the crush of people and touched the fringe on his garment. I knew instantly something had changed. My body felt lighter. Then Jesus exclaimed, "Who touched me?" Peter said, "The crowd is pressing upon you. What do you mean, 'who touched me?'"

But Jesus turned and scanned the crowd, insisting, "I felt power go out from me. I want to know who touched me."

I was terrified. I hadn't meant to offend. Trembling, I came forward and threw myself at his feet. Was I to bleed yet again? But his hand was gentle on mine as he helped me up. He said, "My daughter, your faith was the source of your healing. Be free, and go in peace."

A powerful sense of joy filled me. Since that moment, like the Magdalene, I've followed Jesus and tried to help him however I could.

But now, when Mary Magdalene heard the news of Jesus' death sentence, she went white to the lips. The grief in her face was terrible to behold. And I am ashamed to say that the first thought in my head was, "What will happen to me when Jesus is not here?" But then I thought, "No matter what, I am bound in blood with this man. Holy power, flowing through him, freed me from hemorrhaging, and holy is his own blood that will be spilled here today."

II: JESUS TAKES UP HIS CROSS

V: You free all daughters of our Creator bent under the weight of sin,

R: *As you bend under the weight of the cross.*

I can't believe they really are going to kill this innocent man. Not just innocent—he's *good!* He changed my life. He cured me! After 18 years of being bent almost double, 18 years of terrible pain, 18 years of being told I was to blame for my own disability, 18 years of being alternately shunned and preached at, he set me free.

It was Sabbath and I had gone to the synagogue to pray. It was usually my only outing of the week, since I rarely ventured out to face the alternating pity and scorn of the streets. I noticed him teaching when I entered, and I listened quietly. Much to my dismay, he called to me.

I saw the other men look at me and I shrank from their curiosity. But he smiled and beckoned, and my fears dropped away. As I walked up to him, the other men drew back, whether out of disgust or just to let me pass, I can't say. But he didn't shrink away. Instead, he stood up and put his hands on my shoulders.

His touch felt so good! I had been used to thinking of my body as a source of pain since I was 11. That's when my back began to curve. By the time I was 12, I was as bent as an old woman. Now in my thirtieth year, this man's compassionate touch made me think my body was still beautiful, still made in God's image.

If he had done nothing more than that, it would have been enough. But he didn't stop there. He told me, "You are rid of your infirmity."

As he spoke a warmth flowed from his hands through my shoulders and down my spine. The pain vanished. Then he put his hand under my chin and lifted my head. As he did so, I stood up straight! Hallelujahs rang from my mouth as I looked skyward for the first time in years. I raised my arms over my head and praised God, for I knew who had really given me this gift.

But then a synagogue official came bustling up, and he was angry. "There are six days each week for manual labor. Come and be healed on one of those days. No one's life was in danger here. Couldn't this work have waited until tomorrow?" he announced to the crowd that had gathered.

But Jesus just looked at him calmly, and said, "Don't you untie your donkey or your ox and take it for water on the Sabbath? This woman, this daughter of Sarah, has been held in bondage for eighteen years. Why not release her immediately?"

The official nodded, as if he might have to agree. Other people looked confused. But many of the other women—and quite a few men—and I were overjoyed. I tried to kneel before Jesus, but he stopped me, holding my hand. What we said then remains between the two of us.

But I will tell you this. I followed him to Jerusalem, and I know, as I watch him take up his cross, that I will follow him anywhere, even to Calvary, and beyond.

III: JESUS FALLS FOR THE FIRST TIME

V: You have heard our cries.

R: *Even as you fall beneath the weight of our sins, you have mercy on us.*

When the women begin keening, my heart jumps into my throat. This is dangerous! The Romans won't appreciate our public grief over the death of a man they have judged a criminal. They might arrest all of us too!

But these fears last only a second. Then my heart fills with admiration for the courage of the other women. I, too, lift my voice in protest and lament and walk with them behind the soldiers who surround Jesus and his terrible burden.

The men have all disappeared. I sort of understand that. The Romans are more likely to crucify them, too, than us women. But we women will not leave Jesus' mother, and she will not leave him. I can't blame her. I, too, am a mother. I followed him from southern Phoenicia and I, too, will follow him to the death.

I am a Greek, by birth a Syrophenician, by religion a Canaanite. Jesus' people call me a pagan because my religion is not theirs. The Jews' holy teachings say that one day all of us—all peoples—will live together in peace, with God as our emperor. And somehow, the second I saw Jesus, I wondered if he would be the one to establish that kingdom. He had come quietly to the region of Tyre and Sidon, not wanting anyone to know he was there. But I recognized God's power in him, and in my great need, threw myself at his feet.

"Have mercy on me and my daughter, for she is possessed by a devil," I pleaded.

Jesus didn't say anything. But I wouldn't give up. My daughter's life was at stake. I would have stayed there until I died to get help for her. Finally, some of the men with him said, "Give her what she wants. She's shouting at us; she'll never go away."

Jesus turned to me and asked, "Is it fair to take the children's food and throw it to their dogs?"

"Yes," I said immediately, "for the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the family table."

Jesus smiled at me. "Great is your faith. Let it be done as you desire."

I leapt up and ran home. When I flung myself into my daughter's room, she was sitting up in bed, smiling. The demon was gone! In joy, I praised God.

Now as my daughter and I walk along behind him, our grief rings out against the walls of Jerusalem. My daughter gasps as we see him fall. His mother is standing at a turn in the street and her hands reach out, just as they must have done countless times when he was an infant learning to walk. He pushes himself up and staggers on. If I could, I would give my life to spare his.

IV: JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER

V: Body of my body, blood of my blood

R: *The blood of Christ, the Cup of Salvation*

I am standing next to his mother when he sees her. He had risen from his fall and walked only a few steps when he raised his head, as if she had called out to him, though she made no sound. I think my heart will break at the look of compassion that appears on his face at the sight of her. She reaches out her hand and touches his cheek, cupping it with that tender gesture of mothers from the beginning of time. Their eyes, so alike, meet and hold. Neither of them weeps, although Mary's body seems bent with grief.

The soldiers are uneasy, looking away. None of them is very old, and I suspect they can't help but think of their own mothers. Finally, one of them puts his hand on Jesus' back and says in a gruff voice, "Keep moving."

V: THE CROSS IS LAID ON SIMON OF CYRENE

V: Have mercy on me, for I am heavily burdened.

R: *Let all my fear lose itself in your will.*

I am standing with my husband, Simon of Cyrene, wondering what all the noise is about. We have just entered the city and have barely caught our breath, when suddenly a Roman soldier hails my husband.

"You!" the soldier says. "Come here."

I am shocked. We are not common people, to be ordered around this way. Simon is an important man in our community in Ethiopia. We have come to worship at the Temple as our people have from the time of Solomon. Why, we list one of Solomon's wives among our ancestors! And this Roman soldier treats my husband like a slave.

They grab Simon and pull him into the street. As they do so, I see this poor wretch bent under the weight of a crossbeam. The soldiers order Simon to take the beam from him. I am frightened and furious—how dare they thrust Simon into this mess! Women are crying and carrying on as if this were an important man, and not some common criminal. Simon is the important man, not this other one. This whole mess has nothing to do with us!

But Simon, who can't bear to see even a donkey suffer, gently takes the beam from the poor man. As he does, he says, "I will bear your burden a short while, sire."

The bloody man lifts his head, and nods. Sire! Why on earth would Simon call this criminal "sire?" But then I see Simon's face, and I know something...different is happening. Simon is a proud man, not given to honoring people without cause. And here he is bowing to this bloody wreck of a man as he takes the beam from him.

I open my mouth to protest, but Simon, who knows me all too well, looks up and says, "All is well. Come, follow us." Marveling, I do so, wondering how all this will end.

VI: A WOMAN WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS

V: Woman and man, all genders, are made in the image of God.

R: ***Show us the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.***

I wait for him by my door. I know he will have to pass by here on the way out to Golgotha. They all do, everyone condemned to be crucified. And so I wait, hoping to offer him some tiny comfort.

I know they have beaten him. I can't help thinking that might be a good thing. The weaker he is when they hang him on that cross, the shorter his ordeal will be. I hear the keening of the women long before I see them. The Roman soldiers turn the corner at the bottom of my street and there he is. A richly dressed black man has been pressed into carrying the crossbeam—probably because the soldiers are afraid Jesus will die before they can kill him!

Jesus is already staggering on the steps of the narrow street, and my heart breaks at the sight. As he slowly nears my door, I see in horror that they have pressed a crown of thorns onto his head—some soldier's idea of fun. The thorns have pierced his scalp and blood courses down his face, nearly blinding him. As the soldiers push past, I remove my veil and shove myself toward him.

To my surprise, the soldiers let me through. I bend down to Jesus and put my veil to his face to wipe away the blood. He puts his hands over mine, holding the soft cloth to his face for a few seconds. Then he hands it back to me with a sigh and a small smile. A soldier grabs my shoulder and sets me aside, and Jesus continues limping up the sloping street. Tears begin to run down my face, and I lift my veil to wipe them away. As I look at my veil, I have to hold back a scream, for there, looking back at me, is the true image of his face. I hold it to my heart, and I weep.

VII: JESUS FALLS A SECOND TIME

V: From the little she had, she has put in everything.

R: ***For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.***

Even with the help of the man called Simon, he soon falls again. As he does, a great groan goes up from the women, and our keening grows louder.

How different he is today from the day I first encountered him in the Temple. I had gone to place my tiny mite into the Temple treasury, hoping it could help some other person in need. As I turned from doing this, I found him smiling at me.

“Look,” he called out to the men with him. “This poor widow's gift is worth far more than all the other contributions, for they gave of their abundance from the money they had left over after buying luxuries for themselves, while she gave all the money she had from the little she has to live on.”

At first I was embarrassed to have all these men looking at me. But then I realized he was not making fun of me but instead, was honoring me. I had heard about this man's teachings, but I had been too shy to get near enough to hear him. I had never had time to study very much, and I was afraid I was too stupid to understand what he might be talking about. But as I heard more that day, I realized that many of his

teachings were like this—simple stories of everyday people used to illustrate important points. So I stayed to listen, and listening, I discovered new depths in myself.

That's why, when he fell again I looked away, unable to bear his humiliation.

This man changed my life.

The least I can do is to stay with him as they take his.

VIII: JESUS ADDRESSES THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

V: All who pass by, look and see: is there any sorrow like my sorrow?

R: *Daughters, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.*

When he painfully pulls himself up from where he has fallen, he sees our grieving group of women. His look causes us to fall silent. Then he speaks, his voice soft with pity.

“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are coming when people will say, ‘Blessed are those who are childless, blessed are the wombs that have never given birth and the breasts that have never nursed.’”

The words fall among us like burning spears. The crowded narrow street grows quiet as he speaks; and his voice seems to pick up volume as it bounces off the stone walls.

“Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us up!’ For if this is what they do when the wood is green, what will happen when the wood is dry?”

“What does that mean?” a woman whispers. And I think, he is the green wood, still alive and with us, and these fools are killing him. If we can execute this godly man, what hope is there for us when we can no longer see him, or touch him, or hear him? The future he hints at is not one I want to think of.

Around me, the women move on, the sound of their grief washing up like waves against the blank walls of the city.

IX: JESUS FALLS A THIRD TIME

V: Our bond with you strengthens our bond with one another.

R: *You never abandon us to walk alone.*

When they arrested Jesus, the men urged us all to go into hiding. They were afraid the Romans would sweep the area, to try to catch all of us who followed him.

But his mother refused to leave. Hearing this, I told my husband Cleopas to go with the others. I would stay. Cleopas protested, fearing for me. But I told him I would be safe, for the Romans would never

suspect mere women of being dangerous. We agreed to meet later, in the upper room of the house where we had shared the Passover meal with Jesus the day before.

As I watched Cleopas leave, I realized it was the first time we had been apart in years, certainly since we had decided to follow Jesus. For the past year, we had traveled with him as he taught, watched over him as he slept, marveled at the miracles he performed, and wondered at the things he told us. Most of all, we loved him. And our bond with him strengthened our bond with each other.

It is that bond that puts Cleopas in danger. He has been seen with Jesus too often. But my womanhood renders me invisible to the Roman soldiers, and to many of my own people as well. We Marys had often talked of this among ourselves, and reminded one another that our namesake, the prophet Miriam, had also been thrust into the background.

So we know we can stay here in relative safety, as long as we don't create too much of an uproar, or irritate powerful men. We've got some practice staying within those lines.

That's why, as we walk through the streets behind Jesus and the soldiers, our lament rising above the heads of the shoppers in the market, the peddlers at their carts, the merchants in their doorways, one part of my brain is busy gauging the reaction of the Romans. Are they getting angry? Are we pushing our luck too far? Deep though my grief is, for his mother's sake I know I have to stay alert for any change in the Romans that might put her in danger.

Each time Jesus falls, my heart breaks again. When he came face to face with his stricken mother, I felt as if I were choking on wormwood and gall. And now, just as we approach the city gate, he falls once more. My heart lurches, for he doesn't move. Is he dead? Is it over? Hope and grief war in my soul. But then one of the soldiers grabs a bucket from an old woman mopping a shop, and pours the dirty water over him.

As he stirs, his mother groans. It's not over yet. He rises and walks unsteadily out the city gate. We follow, walking toward Golgotha.

X: JESUS IS STRIPPED OF HIS GARMENTS

V: May our children sit beside you, and drink of your cup?

R: ***Do you know what you are asking?***

As we walk through the city gate, and onto that dreary hillside, I think I may faint. This cannot be happening!

When he fell the third time, I thought, "It's over. He's dead." And for a second, a mad hope possessed me. Maybe Jesus' suffering could end like this, instead of on that terrible travesty of a tree.

My two sons, James and John, went away with the other men, but I suspect John will soon return. He will never let Jesus die alone, even if it means risking his own arrest. Both my boys have been with Jesus from the time he called to them, while they were mending nets with my husband Zebedee in our family fishing boat on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus is their cousin, but we all knew he was someone very special, meant for bigger things than we could truly imagine. When I began to understand just how big, I went to him and requested a favor.

“What do you want?” he had asked me.

“That these sons of mine may sit beside you, one on your right hand and one on your left, when you are in your kingdom.”

“You do not know what you are asking,” he said gently. And turning to my sons, he asked, “Can you drink the cup that I will drink?”

And they replied, “Yes, we can.”

“So be it,” he said. “You shall drink my cup, but positions of power are not mine to give. They are awarded by God our Creator.”

After that, Jesus often teased my sons, calling them the “Sons of Thunder.” Some suppose he’s referring to my husband, but our whole family knows he means me, Salome. I am ambitious for my boys, but I also know that wherever Jesus goes, I want my sons to go too. For good or ill, this is their destiny. And my husband’s, and mine.

And now, as I watch him standing on this windswept hillside, I am realizing just how bitter this cup we all must drink will be. I keep remembering Jesus as a little boy, this bright-eyed cousin full of life and joy. His smile lit up the entire house, and his laughter would send us all off in fits of giggles. Now our laughter has been drowned.

The Roman soldiers set about their task methodically. Some of them begin preparing the cross while others strip Jesus of his garments, dividing them among themselves, casting lots for his cloak. His poor abused body looks so frail as he stands there exposed to the crowd’s jeers. One soldier offers him wine mingled with gall, but after one taste, he turns his head away.

I take his mother’s hand. and then someone takes mine. It’s John, come to be with us at the end.

XI: JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

V: Our hearts feel every blow of that hammer.

R: *Your wounds are of our making.*

As I watch the soldiers strip Jesus and pull him down onto the cross, I long to scream, “Stop this madness! This is an innocent man! A good man!”

I know from painful personal experience.

I was a maid in the household of an important merchant in Jerusalem, and young and foolish. I had been betrothed since I was a child, but the boy and I hadn’t yet lived together. The merchant’s son convinced me he loved me, and I allowed him to come to my bed. His mother found us. She called me an adulteress, and locked me in my room. I was terrified. What would she do to me? What would the neighbors say? And my parents?

At daybreak they dragged me to the Temple. There was a man sitting there, surrounded by people. The Temple officials threw me to the ground in front of him. They said, “Rabbi, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. The Law says we should stone her. Tell us, what do you say?”

I was confused. Who was this man? Why were they asking him? What were they up to? While it’s true the Law prescribes stoning for many offenses, I also knew the death penalty was rarely, if ever, actually imposed. So why were they even putting the question to this man?

Meanwhile, I thought I might die of shame.

The man ignored them, drawing with his finger in the dust near my face. I couldn't see what he was writing, and I'm not sure anyone else could, either. But they kept at him, and he kept ignoring them. Finally, he looked up and said quietly, "Let the one among you who has not sinned be the first to throw a stone."

Then, bending down, he drew some more in the dust, smiling sideways at me. One by one, the men who had accused me silently slipped away, until this man and I were alone.

"Where have they all gone?" he asked me. I just shook my head in bewilderment.

Then he asked, "Tell me, has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," I said softly.

"And neither do I," he said. "Go now, and sin no more."

And he helped me to my feet, smiled at me, and gave me a gentle push. "Go," he said with a smile. And I did. I went and got my belongings, and set out to find the company of Jesus. With him and his disciples, I would start a whole new life, with or without a husband.

And now these fools are going to kill him! I hear a terrible groan from his mother and look up. Oh, dear God! They are not tying him to the cross, they are nailing him to it. My heart feels every blow of that hammer. As they jerk his feet together and begin driving the nails through that precious skin, his body moves convulsively upward. And I collapse to the ground in my grief.

XII: JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

V: I know if my grief were a river,

R: *The whole earth would drown.*

I watch them stretch his naked body out on the cross. Even in this moment of complete vulnerability, his bare skin torn, he still looks strong, like the working man he is. As I look at him through eyes blurred with tears, he is no longer just one man, but seems instead to embody all of suffering humankind. Could any human endure such a burden?

I would die in his place without a moment's regret. That they should touch one hair on that adored head or hurt one inch of that body, sickens me with grief and rage. I have loved him forever, it seems, even though I met him only three years ago. I knew from the moment we first spoke that he had loved me from before I was born.

I would have loved him even if he had not healed me of my affliction, taken from me that deep-seated sadness that had clouded my days ever since I reached puberty. For some unknown reason—some unknown demon—I seemed always to walk in sadness. I yearned to end this soul-eating pain.

Then I met him, and the sun rose in my life. With a glance he removed the pall of sadness that had hung over my days.

He called me “beloved disciple,” and when the inevitable rumors began, I went crying to him. He gentled my tears away and said, “Mary, feel my hand on your face. I am touching the image of God. Nothing they say can change that, not in my eyes, and certainly not in the eyes of the One who made you.”

“And know this,” he said. “That great sadness will never again fall upon you. My peace will be with you forever.”

“My peace will be with you forever...” I cling to those words as the Romans stretch him out upon that dreadful cross. I brush tears from my eyes, and see more clearly what they are about to do. Oh Holy One, help us! They are not tying him to the cross. They are nailing him to it!

I turn to shield his mother from the sight, but it’s too late. She lets out a low guttural sound, like a woman in labor. I put my arm around her shoulders, and feel her slight body shudder with every blow of that accursed hammer.

When they pull the cross upright and drop it into a hole in the rock I think the jolt will tear his arms from his body. And for a terrible, interminable time we wait, as he slowly weakens. Finally, I hear him give himself to his Father. Without looking, I know he is gone.

And I know if my grief were a river, the whole earth would drown.

XIII: THE BODY OF JESUS IS PLACED IN THE ARMS OF HIS MOTHER

V: Do not call me Naomi, which means pleasant;

R: *Call me Mara, which means bitter, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.*

I waited in pain for him to be born. Now I wait in pain for him to die.

I cannot take my eyes off him, for every second that passes takes him farther from me. Where is my bright angel now?

I would be the God-Bearer, the angel said. Well, I did my part. And now here he is, this Child of God dying in a dismal dusty place.

Anger washes through me, followed by new waves of grief. For days I’ve been an ocean, wracked by storms of emotion that threaten to drown my soul, kill my faith. This is too much to ask of me, Beloved! I believed Your promises. I believed them when I pushed my son into the world with only Joseph and the animals as midwives. I believed them when the shepherds and the kings came. I believed them when my angel warned Joseph to take us into Egypt. And I believed them when, at the Temple, he disappeared. I feared You already had taken him from me, much too soon. We searched for him three whole days, days that felt like years. When we found him back teaching in the Temple, he said he had to be about Your business.

But Joseph and I persuaded him to wait a bit longer. And when the time came, it was still too soon by my heart’s reckoning. But I had vowed to do Your will, and so I helped him any way I could. Many times that

meant stepping aside, occasionally it meant helping others to understand, and nearly always, it meant biting my tongue when I feared he'd gone too far, too fast.

But this! Oh Beloved, is this necessary? Must our child suffer so? Take him! Take him now, before I go mad with rage and pain.

But no, wait! Do not take him yet... This is the body of my body, the blood of my blood. I will devour him with my eyes. I will carry him within me forever.

His soft summons of "Mother" reaches me as if in a dream. I move as close to his feet as the soldiers will permit, John beside me.

"Mother," my dying son says to me, lifting his chin slightly to point at John. "Behold your son."

And to John he says, "Behold your mother."

His voice is almost too faint to hear.

"I am thirsty," he rasps. I turn in silent appeal. The young soldier at the foot of the cross hesitates. Then, with a shrug, he puts a sponge soaked in cheap wine onto his lance and hoists it to Jesus. He wets his lips, and speaks again, his words tearing into my heart like knives.

"It is finished."

Then he cries out to You, Beloved.

"Abba, into Your hands I commend my spirit."

He drops his head and his eyes meet mine. And as I watch, the light in them dies.

[A moment's silence is kept.]

I hear a scream and wonder whose it is. The sky darkens, thunder rumbles, and a great silence falls. My body feels numb. The darkness seems to last forever. After a time, however, light returns. Shaken, the soldiers begin taking my child down from the cross. One of them, a centurion, I think, motions to them to give me the body.

I sink down on a rock and the soldiers hand him to me. One of them is rough, but the other, gentler, reprimands him with a look. My son draped across my lap, I cradle him, my babe now man. His head lolls against my breast and his hair matted with blood bumps my chin. I gently close his eyes and use my veil to wipe the blood from his face.

I have no tears left. My eyes are spent with weeping, my soul is in tumult, my heart is poured out in grief because of the downfall of my people.

John says something to me, and I look up with fierce eyes.

“Do not call me Naomi, which means pleasant. Call me Mara which means bitter, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.”

John looks shocked, but what do I care? What are all the prophecies to me now? What do I care for all the fine words of men? My child is dead! Agony forces my head back and I scream at the heavens, “My baby! I want my baby back!”

XIV: JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

V: Sorrowful Mother, all humanity shares your loss.

R: *Bless us all, Womb of Humanity, and renew our journey into new life.*

I press my broken son to me, as if I could absorb him once again into my body. Oh, Beloved! Have mercy on me. Pour Your tender mercies down upon me and help me! Help me! I have no strength left.

And once again, You send my bright angel. I feel the warmth at my back and the angel’s hand upon my bent head, and I hear the familiar voice. “Mary, blessed of all women, do not be afraid, for God is pleased with you.”

And I remember the promise: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God...Your son will be great, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

I allow them to take my son’s body from me. They are telling me it’s time to prepare him for burial. Salome has brought spices, and Joseph of Arimathea has offered his nearby tomb. And so I go through the ritual motions. As I once laid his sweet body tenderly in a cradle, I now lay his broken body tenderly in the tomb. The fragrant herbs fill the air. For one last time, I kiss my son’s mortal face, then gently cover it with the sheet of fine white fabric. My hand caresses its softness, and I smile. If only I had had such fine cloth to dress him in while he lived.

But I have no bitterness left. My heart is already looking ahead. We walk outside, and James and John push the great stone over the entrance. I stand looking at the tomb.

How long, Beloved, how long? As my dear friends move about me, peace settles on me. I am again one with Your will. Let it happen as You say.

CONCLUDING PRAYER:

V: Savior of the world, by your blood you have redeemed us.

R: *Save us and help us, we beseech you, O Holy One.*

Jesus our Teacher,

*Remind us always when we walk in sin and death,
And we are tempted to despair,
That out of your death God brought new life.*

Jesus our Brother,

*Comfort us with your powerful mercy,
And give us strength to reach out in love,
Especially to those who fear themselves unlovable.*

Jesus our Savior,

*Remind us that we do not live or die for ourselves.
Rather, we live and die for you.
That is why you came among us, why you died,
and why you live again.*

Jesus our Healer,

*Have mercy upon us.
As we await your coming again,
Help us to value one another, and ourselves.*

Jesus Child of God,

*Remind us that we all are Children of God.
Give us courage to prepare for
the end that awaits us all,
To live in the hope of resurrection,
and at the end, give us peace.*

Amen.

[Adapted from several prayers in the New Zealand Prayer Book]

Women of the Cross: Original by Katie Sherrod, adapted by The Rev. Rhonda M. Lee, Ph.D.

Readers

Kathryn Daily
Pam Emory
Katia Martin
Valeri Callahan
Elizabeth June
Cara Triebel
Kathleen Gould

Monnie Riggin
Valerie Cover
Martha Engelke
Annette Medlin
Kaye Saunders
Lisa Fischbeck
Bobbie Hendrix

Contact us:

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
1737 Hillandale Road Durham, NC 27705
phone 919-286-2273

website: www.stlukesdurham.org information@stlukesdurham.org

The Rev. Greg Farrand, Rector

rector@stlukesdurham.org

The Rev. Monnie Riggin, Deacon

deacon@stlukesdurham.org

David Arcus, Director of Music

davidallenarcus@gmail.com

Kaye Saunders, Parish Coordinator/Assoc. Dir. of Music

parish-coord@stlukesdurham.org

Treasurer Jim Brunnuell: jbrunnuellctp1956@gmail.com

Assistant Treasurer Donald Hamm: d.hamm@stlukesdurham.org

Vestry Clerk Jim Wise: jim.wise@stlukesdurham.org

Class of 2026

Hope Galunas, Senior Warden: hope.galunas@stlukesdurham.org

Wendy Cook: wendy.cook@stlukesdurham.org

Bob Buchanan: bob.buchanan@stlukesdurham.org

Pike Hege: pike.hege@stlukesdurham.org

Class of 2027

Carlton Brown: carlton.brown@stlukesdurham.org

Kelley Lawton: kelley.lawton@stlukesdurham.org

Debbie Stonehouse: debbie.stonehouse@stlukesdurham.org

Peter Taflan: peter.taflan@stlukesdurham.org

Class of 2028

Steve Dedrick, Junior Warden: steve.dedrick@stlukesdurham.org

Daniel Emory: daniel.emory@stlukesdurham.org

Brian Gullett: brian.gullett@stlukesdurham.org

Martha Lassiter: martha.lassiter@stlukesdurham.org

St. Luke's Parish Office Hours:
Mondays-Thursdays 9-3
(closed Tuesdays from 10-11:15)

Rector Office Hours:
Mondays-Wednesdays 9-5
Thursdays available by phone
Other times by appointment