

1. Jesus is condemned

They kept on shouting at the tops of their voices, demanding that he should be crucified.

The crowd, who once hung on his every word, now turn against Jesus, stirred up by self-righteous religious leaders desperate to rid themselves of a trouble-maker who is constantly challenging them. Pilate can find no valid reason to condemn Jesus but, in his weakness, is swayed by the bloodthirsty mob.

Mob mentality still flourishes in our midst today: hostility towards immigrants and other minority groups whipped up by extreme factions. Do we have the courage to challenge them?

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

2. Jesus carries the cross

Before the cock crows today, you will have disowned me three times.

The cross - an agonising burden; no easy place to grip hold; the wood rough and jagged. Betrayed by a kiss. Sold for 30 silver coins - the price of friendship comes cheap. Denied three times over by a beloved disciple.

It's easy to turn our backs on the problems of others; to convince ourselves it's nothing to do with us. The poor and unemployed are labelled 'benefit scroungers' and condemned as worthless.

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3. Jesus falls for the first time

Carrying his own cross he went out of the city to the place of the skull or, as it was called in Hebrew, Golgotha.

Pushed roughly along by the jeering soldiers; stumbling blindly; flung to the ground; flesh torn and bloody; searing pain. Humiliated and broken: the God of love.

One law for the rich and powerful; another for the poor and downtrodden; the weak exploited by the strong. It's not who you are but who you know that counts and whether you can work the system to your advantage.

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4. Jesus comes face to face with his mother

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.

Watching and waiting: a helpless bystander. Even a mother's love is powerless to prevent what is to come. A sword pierces her heart.

There can be few worse torments than seeing your child suffer and die. For the families of hostages, mercilessly tortured and executed, the pain is unimaginable.

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5. Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross

As they were leading him away they seized on a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and made him shoulder the cross and carry it behind Jesus.

Press-ganged by the soldiers to help carry the cross, reluctant to get involved, Simon shows kindness and compassion.

Can your church community provide food, shelter and friendship for those who find themselves homeless: migrants; asylum seekers; ex-prisoners; young people who can no longer stay in a violent or abusive home situation?

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6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

You have said, 'seek my face.' My heart says to you, 'your face, Lord, do I seek.'

Moved to pity by Jesus' plight. Not stopping to think how the soldiers might react; no time to worry about her own safety, Veronica gently wipes his face; eases his suffering with a loving gesture; a simple act of kindness in a world bound up in cruelty and hate.

Could we do more to make newcomers feel welcome in our community? Do we take time to chat to the Big Issue vendor or offer a warm drink on a cold day? Are elderly or lonely people respected and well cared for in our neighbourhood?

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7. Jesus falls for the second time

He had no form or charm to attract us, no beauty to win our hearts.

Weak from the beatings; struggling to pick himself up and carry on, Jesus shares in the hopelessness and misery endured by so many.

Trying desperately to make ends meet. Forced to turn to food banks to feed the family; parents having to go hungry when there isn't enough to go round.

Response: Jesus came into the world to bear witness to the truth; all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice.

8. The women of Jerusalem weep for Jesus

Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep rather for yourselves and for your children.

Hearts bursting with sorrow; desolation that knows no bounds. A suffering not understood in human terms. The ultimate sacrifice: a perfect act of love to redeem a fallen world.

Victims of civil war, traumatised and broken, must rely on the kindness of others. Victims of domestic violence in our own local community need practical help and compassion too. What can we do to support them?

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9. Jesus falls for the third time

He was despised, the lowest of men, a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering.

Yet another fall, this time worse than the two before. Scarcely enough strength to get up again. Truly a man of sorrows: bruised and broken; despised, crushed and pitiful. A lamb led to the slaughter, never even opening his mouth.

The rich get richer at the expense of the poor. Those at the bottom of the pile are forced to take out exorbitant pay-day loans simply to survive whilst city bankers receive five figure bonuses.

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10. Jesus is stripped of his clothes

They shared out my clothing among them. They cast lots for my clothes.

Pitilessly taunted; mocked as a king; stripped to nothing. Every scrap of dignity roughly torn away: the very opposite of worldly power and majesty.

Vulnerable young people suffer cruelly at the hands of internet bullies. In despair, they may self-harm or even take their own lives. How can we re-build their confidence, show them that they are valued and help them find a way through?

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11. Jesus is nailed to the cross

Yet ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried.

Ethnic cleansing; mindless violence; murder; torture; rape; gun crimes on the streets; a lack of care and respect for God's wonderful creation. A man nailed to a cross; a slow, agonising death in the heat of the mid-day sun.

Instead of focusing on the negative in our society, let's work together to build bridges between different groups and celebrate our common hopes and desires.

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12. Jesus dies

Putting a sponge soaked in vinegar on a hyssop stick they held it up to his mouth.

Such a dreadful way to die: his mouth on fire with an unbearable thirst: lips parched and dry. A drink is offered - vinegar - bitter tasting and sour; smarting against cut lips. The bitter vinegar like the bitterness of the mob who clamoured for his blood. The end is near. The sky darkens. It is finished.

Governments and manufacturers profit from selling arms to oppressive regimes whilst basic services suffer cuts. Money that could be used for the good of all is channelled into stockpiling weapons of war and mass destruction. How can we halt this damaging spiral?

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13. Jesus is taken down from the cross

Then a member of the council arrived, an upright and virtuous man named Joseph. He had not consented to what the others had planned and carried out. He lived in hope of seeing the kingdom of God.

Joseph of Arimathea was a secret follower of Jesus, afraid to let his allegiance be known for fear of the Jews. After Jesus was put to death his courage grew and he went to Pilate to ask for the body.

Joseph inspires us to let go of the fear of what others might say and to focus on doing what we know to be right. By putting the needs of the weakest members of our society before our own, we can confront injustice and work together for the common good.

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14. Jesus is placed in the tomb

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, following the Jewish burial custom.

A race against time to finish the burial preparations before the Sabbath begins. Joseph and Nicodemus prepare an empty tomb for Jesus' body; wrap it in a clean burial garment; place it in the tomb and roll a large stone over the entrance to prevent anyone disturbing it.

We too are in a race against time to protect our planet for future generations. Despite clear proof that our consumer life-style is causing irreparable damage, many choose to ignore the warnings, leaving a dangerously high carbon footprint. Can we resolve to make personal changes for the good of all and encourage others to do likewise?

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Justice and Peace Stations of the Cross

