

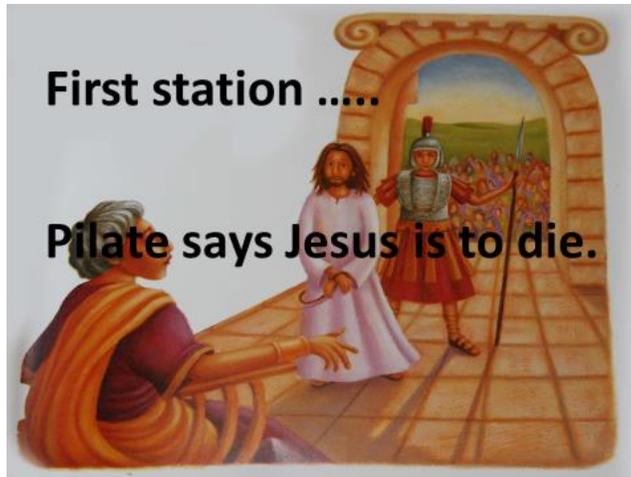


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**'The Story of the Cross'**

**By Mary Joslin**

**Illustrated by Gail Newey**



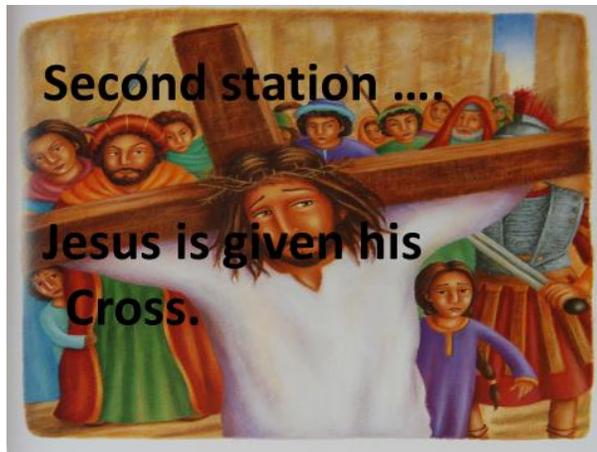
Jesus stands before Pontius Pilate. He is alone. Jesus has done only good things during his life, but the people have been persuaded to want him crucified. Pontius Pilate does not want to kill him, but he is weak and in the end he washes his hands in front of the crowd and gives Jesus to the soldiers.

We remember that Jesus accepted what would happen to him, even though he had prayed to God the father that he wouldn't have to face this day. We remember that Pilate had a choice between doing what was right and doing what was popular. He chose what was best for him and made a wrong decision.

Sometimes we have to make choices. They may not be as important as Pilate's but if we choose wrong over right too often, it can change the people we are. Today, as we remember what happened to Jesus, we ask God to help us to choose the right thing to do, even if, for a while, it might make life difficult for us.

Let us pray:

Loving Father, help us to remember that the gifts of your Holy Spirit give us the wisdom to make the right choices.

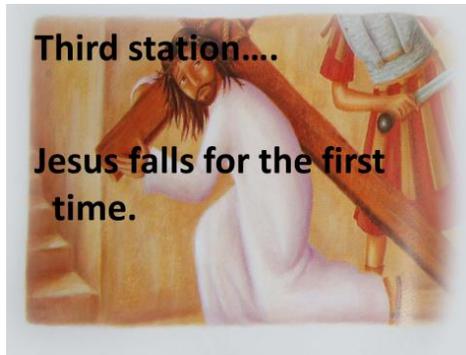


The soldiers give Jesus a heavy cross to carry. They put a red cloak on his shoulders and push a crown made of thorns on his head. They tease him and call him “king of the Jews”.

We remember that Jesus accepted the cross and carried it all the way to Calvary. He did this for us. Let’s take a moment to think about how much Jesus loves us; he loves us so much that he suffered all of this for us.

If we have a problem or something we’re worried about, it can feel like carrying a weight on our shoulders. We might feel we can’t talk to anyone about it, but we should always remember that we can talk to Jesus. He knows how we feel because he has felt it too.

Let us take a moment to talk to God in our heart about anything worrying us today, any burden we are carrying around like a cross.



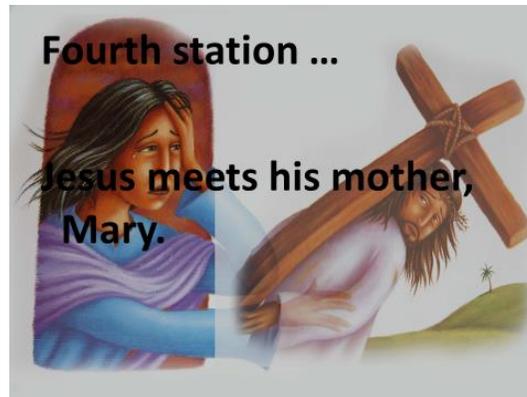
The procession moves out of the city gate. Jesus is unsteady on his feet. The soldiers push him. Jesus is tired. He can hardly carry the cross. He falls. The soldiers pull him up and whip him. The procession moves on.

We remember that even though Jesus fell, he got back up and carried on, he didn't give up. Imagine how alone he must have felt, falling in front of all those people with no one doing anything to help.

If we make a mistake or things don't turn out the way we wanted, it can be hard for us to carry on, to get on with things, but Jesus has given us the example of not letting it get us down. He is with us, supporting us always.

Let us pray:

Jesus our friend, help us to have your strength when things are hard. Help us to keep going, not to give up. Help us to remember that you are with us, especially when we feel most alone.



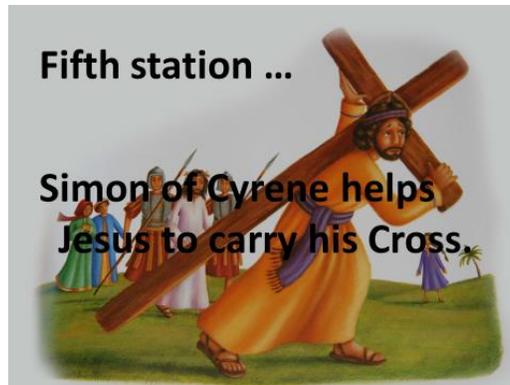
Jesus' mother, Mary sees the procession moving through the streets. She hurries to get near her son. There he is in front of her. He tries to get closer to her but the soldiers block him roughly. The procession moves on.

We take a moment to think about how hard it must have been for Jesus and Mary to meet like this, for a mother to watch her son suffering and for a son to see how much his mother is hurting.

In hospitals here and in parts of the world where there is fighting, children are suffering and their mothers and fathers have to watch them in pain. Today we remember them all.

Let us pray:

Loving God, we pray for all parents, especially those who have to see their children suffering in any way. Help them to know that you are with them in their pain.



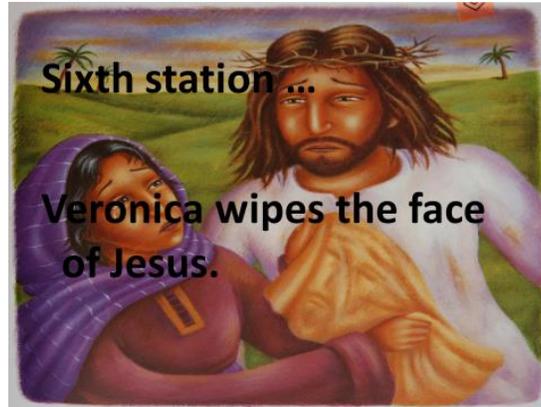
The soldiers see that Jesus is weak, he might not be able to continue. The soldiers see a man in the crowd. His name is Simon. A soldier pushes Simon towards Jesus and makes him help. Simon sees Jesus is bruised and bleeding. He picks up the cross and carries it with Jesus. They move on.

We remember that Simon was just watching in the crowd, he didn't want to get involved. The soldiers forced him, but even so, his help made a difference to Jesus and he was able to carry on.

Sometimes, even what can seem a small thing can make a big difference to others; a smile when someone is feeling sad, or taking the time to have a chat. Sometimes we can find it hard to accept help from others, to admit we need help.

Let us pray:

Loving Jesus, help us to show love and concern for others and to accept love and concern when it's offered.



Veronica steps towards Jesus with a soothing cloth. She wants to comfort him. She gently wipes his face. The soldiers roughly push her back. They continue along their way.

Veronica's kind and gentle act is such a contrast to all the cruel things that have been done to him. Veronica is his friend, she understood how Jesus is feeling and offers him the kind care he needs.

Sometimes we can be so busy with our own lives that we don't notice that a friend is sad or in trouble and needs our help.

Let us pray:

Jesus our friend, help us to do as Veronica did, to take the time to notice when someone needs our help and to do what we can to make them feel better.



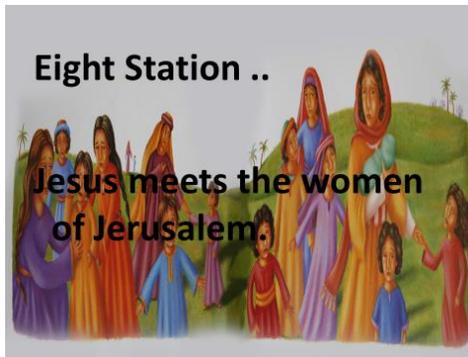
Jesus is getting tired. He is getting weaker. He falls. Jesus struggles to get up. He keeps trying until he makes it to his feet. He moves on.

We remember how tired Jesus must have been feeling and how hard it was for him to fall a second time. He must have been finding the Cross very heavy and painful.

Jesus loved his Father so much that he trusted that God was with him and would help him to carry on no matter how hard things would get.

Let us pray:

Jesus, our brother, help us to always trust in your love for us, especially when we feel like giving up.



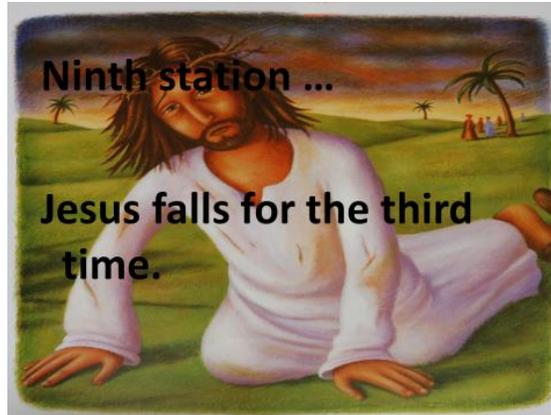
Jesus hears the crying of the women in the crowd. He knows they are sad. He stops and talks to them. Even at this terrible time, Jesus is thinking of others.

We remember that these women are friends of Jesus who have travelled with him from the beginning. Even though it is dangerous, and they are so very sad about what is happening to him, they stay with him to the end.

We can get confused sometimes about who our real friends are, but good and loyal friends are a blessing. Real friends are there for us when we are sad or worried as well as when we are happy and want to celebrate.

Let us pray:

Jesus, thank you for the gift of good friends. Help us to know who our real friends are. Help us to see you as our friend, with us in happy times and sad times.



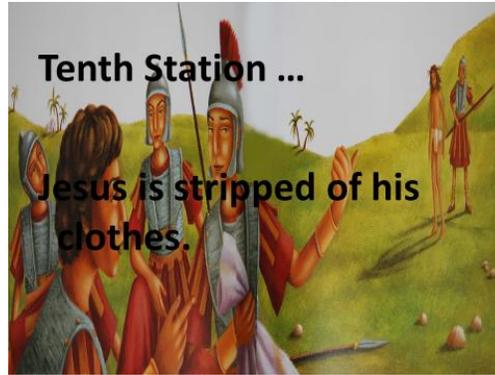
Jesus continues walking; tired, in pain, with the soldiers pushing him. Jesus falls once more. They make fun of him. He gets up, steadies himself and walks the last few yards to Golgotha - the "Place of the Skull".

We remember how hard it must have been for Jesus to get up a third time. He must be tired and in a lot of pain but even still he gets up again and carries on.

We know there are lots of people working hard in many parts of the world to bring Jesus' Good News to others. In many places they work in difficult and dangerous circumstances and they often suffer because of their work.

Let us pray:

God our Father, we pray for all who believe in your son, Jesus Christ, help us to spread your message of love, and be with us especially if we feel discouraged.



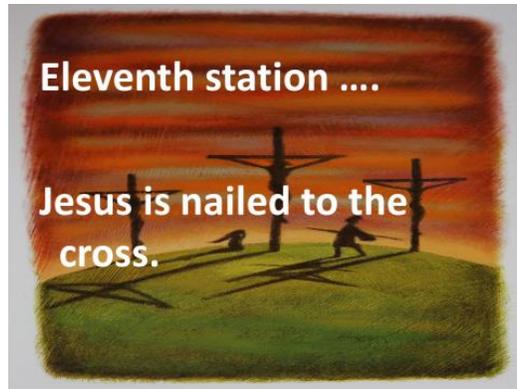
The soldiers roughly pull Jesus' red cloak off him and throw it on the ground. The soldiers decide to toss a coin to see who will take home his clothes. They humiliate him and try to take away his dignity.

We remember that Jesus is being humiliated and embarrassed, that he is suffering for us. Jesus is very brave.

We worry about wearing the right clothes and sometimes we judge other people by what they wear or what they have, but Jesus is reminding us that what is on the outside is not important. God doesn't worry about the clothes we wear. God knows what is in our heart and wants us to see others in the same way.

Let us pray:

God our Father, help us to see everyone we meet as our brother or sister in Christ, made in your image and loved by you.



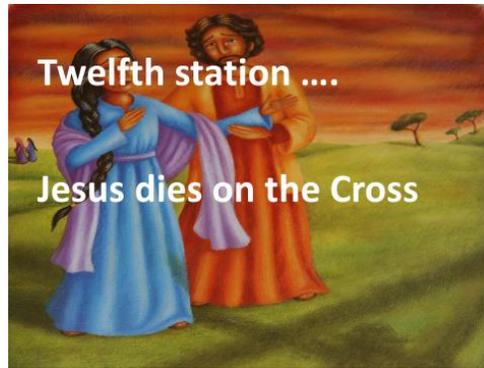
The soldiers grab Jesus and nail his hands and feet to the cross. It is a cruel thing to do that causes him a lot of pain and suffering.

It is hard for us to imagine what Jesus was going through. Good Friday reminds us to take a moment to think about what Jesus suffered for us and to thank him.

If someone we love is sick or in hospital it is hard for us to see them in pain, but we know that Jesus is with them in their suffering. We thank God for all those who look after people who are unwell.

Let us pray:

Jesus, we pray today for everyone in our community who is sick in any way. We pray that you will be with them and with their families and friends who care for them and about them.



Mary stays at the foot of the cross and prays. Jesus says “I am thirsty”. A soldier offers him wine mixed with vinegar. Then Jesus says ‘my God, my, God why have you forsaken me’? Finally Jesus says “Father into your hands I commend my spirit”. A few moments later he says “it is finished”. He dies. It is only three o’clock but the sky is dark.

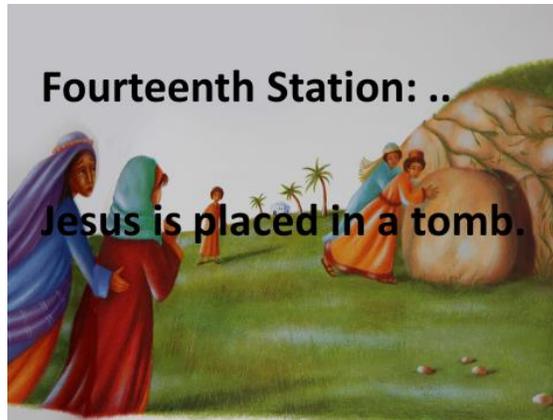


Mary stays under the cross with her son. Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus gently remove Jesus from the cross and lay him in the arms of his mother, Mary. Joseph offers his burial tomb for Jesus. Mary holds Jesus. She doesn't want to let him go but she has to.

All the hurting has stopped and Jesus is at peace. His mother and his friends take care of his body and show him love after all the hurt.

We are very sad when someone we love dies but we know that they are at peace and are with God who loves them.

Let us remember everyone we love who has died



Jesus' friends take care of his body. They wrap him in a white sheet. They lay him gently in the tomb. The soldiers stand guard.

We remember how sad Jesus' friends must be. They had given up so much to follow him and now he is gone. They treat his body gently with respect and love and bury him safely.

Jesus' friends showed love and care for his body after all his suffering. When we receive Jesus' body at Communion, it's our chance to show him that love and respect.

Let us pray together:

Jesus our loving friend, thank you for teaching us how to love you and love each other. Help us to always be people of love and compassion. Amen.