

St. Mark's Episcopal Church - Waupaca, Wisconsin

Stations of the Cross – Pray for Israel and Gaza



Opening Devotion

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.** Lord, have mercy.

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.

We will glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ:
In whom is our salvation, our life, and resurrection.

Let us pray. (Silence) 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.**¹

The First Station: Jesus is Condemned to Death



The Hamada family was trying to get to safety as they followed an order from the Israeli military to evacuate their neighborhood in Gaza City. Bashar and his wife, Anam, piled their children and their young niece, Hind, into the car.²

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests, with the elders and scribes, and the whole council, held a consultation; and they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him to Pilate. And they all condemned him and said, "He deserves to die." When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called "The Pavement," but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. Then he handed Jesus over to be crucified.

God did not spare his own son:
But delivered him up for us all.

Let us Pray. (Silence) Almighty God, whose most dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. ***Amen.***

***Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us.***

The Second Station: Jesus Takes up His Cross

In the operations room of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS)¹ in Ramallah, the landline was ringing. It was 2:28 p.m. Omar al-Qam, the lone dispatcher on duty that day, picked up.

From 2,000 miles away, in Frankfurt, Germany came the steady voice of Mohammed Salem Hamada: “My family members are trapped in Gaza City,” he told Omar. “They were driving a black Kia Picanto and the car was targeted. Some of the people were killed inside.”

Mohammed gave Omar the phone number for his 15-year-old niece, Layan, who had called her uncle in southern Gaza to sound the alarm. The uncle, struggling with patchy cell service, called his cousin in Germany, hoping he could find help.

The uncle relayed what Layan had told him: The Israeli army had opened fire on the family’s car. Her parents and all four of her siblings were dead — Sana, 13, Raghad, 12, Mohammed, 11 and 4-year-old Sarah.

Layan told her uncle she was bleeding. And that her cousin Hind, 6, was the only other survivor.

Omar, in Ramallah, called Layan. She sounded terrified.

“They are firing at us,” she screamed into the phone. “The tank is next to me.”

“Are you hiding?” he asked.

Then came a burst of fire. Layan screamed. The line went dead.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Jesus went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the “Place of a Skull,” which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. Like a lamb he was led to the slaughter; and like a sheep that before its shearers is mute, so he opened not his mouth. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.

¹ The Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) is an officially recognized independent Palestinian National Society. It enjoys legal personality and is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The Society, which operates in Palestine and the diaspora, is guided by the Geneva Conventions and the Movement’s Fundamental Principles, i.e. Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality.

The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all:

For the transgression of my people was he stricken.

Let us Pray. (Silence) Almighty God, whose beloved Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption: Give us courage to take up our cross and follow him; who lives and reigns for ever and ever. ***Amen.***

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:

Have mercy upon us.

The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

In shock, Omar said he went to find his colleague, Rana Faqih, in another room. He was trembling, she recalled.

Rana said she walked him back to his chair in the dispatch room and stood next to him as he dialed again.

It was Hind who answered this time.

“Are you in the car now?” he asked her.

“Yes,” came the small voice on the other end.

Rana took the phone, telling the 6-year-old she would stay on the phone until help arrived.

Hind’s voice was so quiet, it was impossible to make out her reply.

“Who are you with?” Rana asked.

“With my family,” Hind told her.

Rana asked if she had tried to wake up her family. Hind responded: “I’m telling you they’re dead.”

Rana asked her how the car had been hit.

“A tank,” Hind said. “The tank is next to me ... it’s coming towards me ... it’s very, very close.”

Rana’s voice was strong and clear and reassuring. Hind’s was faint and shaky. Rana urged her to keep talking. They prayed together. Rana read to her from the Quran.

Don’t cry, she told the little girl, though Rana was also fighting back tears.

“Don’t be scared,” she told Hind. “They’re not going to hurt you. ... Don’t leave the car.”

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped; but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and was born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name which is above every name. Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, and kneel before the Lord our Maker, for he is the Lord our God.

Surely he has borne our griefs:

And carried our sorrows.

Let us Pray. (Silence) O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright: Grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

***Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us.***

The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Afflicted Mother

Minutes passed. Hind appeared to drop the phone. The silences were longer now.

“If I could get you out I would,” Rana said. “We’re trying our very best.”

Rana was crying now, but tried to keep her voice steady.

“Please come get me,” Hind said. Again and again: “Come get me.”

There was a distant rumble of fire in the background.

“Come get me,” Hind repeated.

Rana, 37, has been working in Crisis and Disaster Management. She had faced situations like this before, she said, but never with a girl so young.

Her colleagues had located the car in a neighborhood near Al-Azhar University. Getting an ambulance there, inside a closed military zone, would require permission – a process that involved multiple agencies. The dispatchers knew it could take hours.

The operators said they tried to stay focused on Hind. Nisreen Qawwas, 56, the head of PRCS’s mental health department, took the lead.

“She practiced deep breathing exercises with us, and I told her we would be with her, second by second,” Nisreen recalled.

But Hind began to grow distant, Nisreen said, and hung up multiple times, growing frustrated that no one had come for her.

Eventually, operators said they reached Hind’s mother, who was sheltering elsewhere in Gaza City, and patched her into the call.

“Her mother’s voice made a real difference,” Nisreen said. “Every moment she said to her mother, ‘I miss you momma.’”

“Her mother told her, ‘You will be with me in a little while and I will hug you,’” Nisreen remembered.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

To what can I liken you, to what can I compare you, O daughter Jerusalem? What likeness can I use to comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For vast as the sea is your ruin. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. The Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.

A sword will pierce your own soul also:

And fill your heart with bitter pain.

Let us Pray. (Silence) O God, who willed that in the passion of your Son a sword of grief should pierce the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary his mother: Mercifully grant that your Church, having shared with her in his passion, may be made worthy to share in the joys of his resurrection; who lives and reigns for ever and ever. ***Amen.***

***Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us.***

The Fifth Station: The Cross Is Laid on Simon the Cyrene

Three hours later, the Palestinian ministry told them they had received permission from Israel to send paramedics to Hind. PRCS dispatched the nearest ambulance, 1.8 miles away, to the scene with two paramedics.

Nisreen said she tried to keep Hind engaged. They talked about the sea and the sun and her favorite chocolate cake.

But everyone could tell the little girl was fading. She said her hand was bleeding, that there was blood on her body. It was dark now. She was hungry, thirsty and cold, she told her mother.

Dispatchers said the paramedics radioed in as they neared the vehicle. The team in Ramallah encouraged them to move forward, slowly, Nisreen said.

At that moment, dispatchers said, there was “heavy gunfire.” The line with Hind was lost.

Hind’s last sentence, Omar said, was “Come and take me.”

That was at 7 p.m. last Monday, a full week ago. There has been no word from Hind or the ambulance crew since.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

As they led Jesus away, they came upon a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross to carry it behind Jesus. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me: ***Cannot be my disciple.***

Let us Pray. (Silence) Heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came not to be served but to serve: Bless all who, following in his steps, give themselves to the service of others; that with wisdom, patience, and courage, they may minister in his Name to the suffering, the friendless, and the needy; for the love of him who laid down his life for us, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. ***Amen.***

***Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us.***



Hind celebrating her kindergarten graduation.

The Sixth Station: A Woman Wipes the Face of Jesus

Ten years ago, we were preparing to celebrate the bar mitzvah of our son, Hersh. His Torah portion was the same as the one Jews around the world will read in the coming days — the story of Noah and how God destroyed much of the world with a terrible flood.

But Hersh's attention was not on destruction. Instead he focused on how water could save the world. So he swam laps to raise money for an organization that digs wells in Africa to provide clean, lifesaving water.

This is the kind of person Hersh, our oldest child and only son, is: gentle and kind and always finding creative ways to improve things and connect with other human beings.³

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

We have seen him without beauty or majesty, with no looks to attract our eyes. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not. His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of men. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.

Restore us, O Lord God of hosts:

Show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.

Let us Pray. (Silence) O God, who before the passion of your only-begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

***Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us.***

The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls a Second Time

Hersh was camping with his best friend at an outdoor music festival near Israel's border with Gaza when Hamas terrorists began firing machine guns into the crowd of mostly young adults. An estimated 260 people were killed in that attack. We later found out Hersh and his friends managed to escape by car but the vehicle came under rocket fire. They were forced to stop and take cover in a roadside bomb shelter. Terrorists then attacked the shelter, blowing off Hersh's arm from the elbow down by machine gun fire or a grenade or both.

According to witnesses, Hersh, a 23-year-old American-born U.S. citizen, was then ordered into a pickup truck by armed Hamas terrorists and driven toward the Gaza border. The police told us the last known location of his mobile phone was on the Gaza border early Saturday afternoon.

I don't know if he is dead or alive or if I will ever see him again.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. For the transgression of my people was he stricken.

But as for me, I am a worm and no man:

Scorned by all and despised by the people.

Let us Pray. (Silence) Almighty and everliving God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; who lives and reigns for ever and ever. ***Amen.***

***Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us.***

The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

The only thing I know is that this is not the fate that Hersh or any of the captives, among whom are several other Americans, deserves. I am heartbroken, but the messages of support pouring in from near and far make this moment heartwarming at the same time.

I wept this morning receiving messages from his friends in Bremen, Germany, which is home to SV Werder, the team that has a friendly relationship with Hersh's beloved Hapoel Jerusalem soccer team. He befriended these German fans over the years when they visited Jerusalem to watch their team play soccer. Together they painted a peace mural with both Arab and Jewish residents near our home in Jerusalem, where we've lived since Hersh was 7. Just five weeks ago, Hersh spent time with these friends in Germany.

The outreach from these German friends resonates with me especially because Hersh is named after my grandfather Harold and my great-uncle Hershel, who was killed in the Holocaust. It was beautiful for me to be reminded, through these friendships, that for young Germans and Jews particularly, the world that Hersh has lived in has recognized and worked to overcome the terror experienced by my great-uncle.

I never could have imagined that my son would face anything like Hershel faced.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

There followed after Jesus a great multitude of the people, and among them were women who bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."

Those who sowed with tears:

Will reap with songs of joy.

Let us Pray. (Silence) Teach your Church, O Lord, to mourn the sins of which it is guilty, and to repent and forsake them; that, by your pardoning grace, the results of our iniquities may not be visited upon our children and our children's children; through Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

***Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us.***

The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls a Third Time

But this is the new world that Hersh and the rest of us must live in now. The Hamas attacks were the most vicious assaults on Jews since the Holocaust.

I want things to go back to how they were before Saturday morning. Before I saw Hersh's text messages that alerted me he was in grave danger: "I love you" and "I'm sorry." Before Hamas launched its attacks, which have claimed more than 1,200 innocent lives in Israel and resulted in about 150 innocent hostages being held in Gaza with no foreseeable way out. Before my son's phone was a black box with no answer.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

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 besieged me and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation; he has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. Though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes. "Remember, O Lord, my affliction and bitterness, the wormwood and the gall!"

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter:

And like a sheep that before its shearers is mute, so he opened not his mouth.

Let us Pray. (Silence) O God, by the passion of your blessed Son, you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. ***Amen.***

***Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us.***

The Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments

But here we are, stuck in the awful present. Time is slowly ticking into the future, with these hostages approaching a week in captivity. If he is still alive, how much longer can he survive? His wounds are grievous. I hope someone somewhere is being kind to him, caring for him, attending to him.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

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 they divided his garments among them by casting lots. This was to fulfill the scripture, which says, "They divided my garments among them; they cast lots for my clothing."

They gave me gall to eat:

And when I was thirsty they gave me vinegar to drink.

Let us Pray. (Silence) Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

***Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us.***

**The Eleventh Station:
Jesus is Nailed to the Cross**

Hersh is my whole world, and this evil is the flood that is destroying it. I really don't know if anything can save it. If anyone knows, please tell me. To save a life, our sages taught, is to save a world. Please help me save my son; it will save my world.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

When they came to the place which is called 'The Skull,' there they crucified him; and with him they crucified two criminals, one on the right, the other on the left, and Jesus between them. And the scripture was fulfilled which says, "He was numbered with the transgressors."

They pierce my hands and my feet:

They stare and gloat over me.

Let us Pray. (Silence) Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. ***Amen.***

***Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us.***

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

Every single person in Gaza has a mother, or had a mother at some point.

And I would say this, then, as mother to other mothers: If you see Hersh, please help him. I think about it a lot. I really think I would help your son, if he was in front of me, injured, near me.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And when Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished!" And then, crying with a loud voice, he said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." And he bowed his head, and handed over his spirit.

Christ for us became obedient unto death:

Even death on a cross.

Let us Pray. (Silence) O God, who for our redemption gave your only-begotten Son to the death of the cross, and by his glorious resurrection delivered us from the power of our enemy: Grant us so to die daily to sin, that we may evermore live with him in the joy of his resurrection; who lives and reigns now and for ever. ***Amen.***

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:

Have mercy upon us.



Hersh Goldberg Polin, an Israeli-American, who is still missing. Hamas has not notified the family that he has died, so he is presumed to be alive.

The Thirteenth Station: The Body of Jesus Is Placed in the Arms of His Mother

We hold in prayer and with deep sorrow about the atrocities in Israel and Gaza, which have claimed so many innocent lives and have caused devastation and hopelessness throughout the region. We join in grief with those who are now in the midst of war, who have lost loved ones, homes and hopes for peace. We share in the fears of all those who are worried for relatives who are missing, held hostage, called up to serve or fleeing in terror.

We are sorry that we have not spoken sooner and readily acknowledge that we do not all bear this moment equally.

We condemn unequivocally the terrorist attacks, hostage captivity and brutality committed by Hamas and name that these actions are unjust and heinous. We also condemn the blockade of Gaza and retaliation that will cause many people in Gaza to suffer and die. There is no room in our hearts and minds as faithful people of any theology to support hatred, violence or oppression. We support the rights of the people of Israel and Gaza to live in safety, peace and liberation, acknowledging the complexities of the struggle, and the continued oppression, fear and trauma there.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

All you who pass by, behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow. 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. "Do not call me Naomi (which means 'Pleasant'), call me Mara (which means 'Bitter'); for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

Her tears run down her cheeks:

And she has none to comfort her.

Let us Pray. (Silence) Lord Jesus Christ, by your death you took away the sting of death: Grant to us your servants so to follow in faith where you have led the way, that we may at length fall asleep peacefully in you and wake up in your likeness; for your tender mercies' sake. ***Amen.***

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:

Have mercy upon us.

The Fourteenth Station: Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

We pray that all people, regardless of borders, religious affiliation or national status, work for peace, resist oppression, demand liberation and find solidarity. We mourn with our Jewish neighbors who are deeply hurting and fearing for their own well-being and those of their loved ones in Israel. We mourn with our Muslim neighbors who are deeply hurting and fearing for their own well-being and those of their loved ones in Palestine. We pray for the safety of all people who live in the Holy Land that peace and justice might be swift. We are resolute in our opposition to the use of terror and violence against innocent civilians, against human beings anywhere and everywhere.

Antisemitism, Islamophobia and racism are emboldened in this moment, and we must unite to resist all forms of dehumanization, hatred, violence and oppression. We must find ways to uphold our faith in each other, in the God of many names and all nations to be present with us and through us. We must turn toward one another, not against, and continue to build relationships of trust, honesty and courage.⁴

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you:

Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb.

You will not abandon me to the grave:

Nor let your holy One see corruption.

Let us Pray. (Silence) O God, your blessed Son was laid in a tomb in a garden, and rested on the Sabbath day: Grant that we who have been buried with him in the waters of baptism may find our perfect rest in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns for ever and ever. ***Amen.***

***Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One:
Have mercy upon us.***

Concluding Prayer

Savior of the world, by your cross and precious blood you have redeemed us:

Save us, and help us, we humbly beseech you, O Lord.

Let us pray. (Silence) We thank you, O God, that you have delivered us from the dominion of sin and death and brought us into the kingdom of your Son; and we pray that, as by his death he has recalled us to life, so by his love he may raise us to eternal joys; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. ***Amen.***

To Christ our Lord who loves us, cleansed us from all sin, and made us a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.

Amen.

Endnotes

1. "The Book of Occasional Services 2018." *The Episcopal Church Book of Occasional Services 2018*, The Episcopal Church, www.episcopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/01/lm_book_of_occasional_services_2018.pdf . Accessed 10 Feb. 2024.
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3. Goldberg, Rachel. "I Hope Someone Somewhere Is Being Kind to My Boy." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 12 Oct. 2023, www.nytimes.com/2023/10/12/opinion/israel-hamas-hostage.html.
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