

The Henry Luce III Center for the Arts and Religion presents

Stations of the Cross: the Weight of Dust

Clay Tiles and Poems

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Dust. Stardust. Soil of Eden. House dust. Rust. Dust of dry clay. The psalmist says: "Remember that you are dust; from dust you came and to dust you will return." Dust has weight: the weight of being human and living a human life. It is the weight of choices and dead ends, of consequences both hopeful and harmful. Dust carries the high cost and great adventure of our humanity. Jesus came to share our dust, the possibilities and the pain. Jesus came to carry in community with us all, the weight of being human.

Artist's Statement

These tiles began in the fall of 2007 as a series appropriate for the Lenten season. I decided to develop a series of Stations of the Cross because clay is a very physical medium and fits well the physical act of walking which is the basis of this devotional aid. I thought about the heart standing in for the body of Jesus on the cross. In our culture

the heart is a physical, emotional, as well as a spiritual icon. I hoped the various textures and positions of the hearts could express some of what Jesus might be experiencing on this his last day of life as we humans know it. The glazing process is unpredictable and mirrored the unscripted nature of Jesus' walk to crucifixion.

The series of Stations I chose is the traditional series rooted in church history. I worked from the title of each station as well as scripture and Christian tradition, hoping for a simple response as one who is participating in the walk. I worked in random order as one might see the event from where one stood in the procession, and how one walked, keeping up with the crowd or falling behind. Influences included visiting stations in Jerusalem which were simple rather than ornate. I was also influenced by seeing the Stations painted by abstract artist Barnett Newman. My own painting and drawing tends toward abstraction.

The poems came in response to my work with the clay, following what my hands came to know. I had not intended to write any poems, but in response to the fourth station, Jesus Meets His Mother, it being Advent at the time, the poem seemed to come unbidden. I welcomed it and learned from it, but did not intend to write more. After the tiles were all completed, and before I began to make the frames, I took a break. Over that time I decided to see if more poems would come forward. Again, working in random order, in response to the process of working with the clay, the poems found the voices of various pilgrims walking this walk of Good Friday, and of Jesus himself. The final poem is a modern day pilgrim's response.

Station 1: Jesus Is Condemned to Death

I find it hard
to believe that Jesus
is condemned to death.
He spoke of loving others
as you love yourself.
His enemies consume others
with their grasping at what they call life.

I think they fear most God's heart of flesh,

a heart that cares about the least,
the un-noteworthy, the last in line,
the ones who could do nothing
to satisfy their needs.

They choose to kill this Heart of God
and stone their hearts against the
outcries of their dying souls.

In Jesus' words and in his life
my ears caught truth.
His quality of life was gentleness
so not to complicate the situation of
the smoldering wick, the bruised reed;
quietly, but they heard and feared
his heart of flesh.

Today
God's Heart of Flesh
is crucified by stony hearts.

Station 2: The Cross Is Laid Upon Him

When they laid the cross on your back, Jesus
what did your heart do and your blood pressure.
When they laid the cross on your back
it was a physical experience not a spiritual triumph.
When they laid the cross on your back
it was heavy with the weight of
wood and nails and fear—
active and passive.

Station 3: Jesus Falls the First Time

Jesus, I leave now.
The cross upon your back
was hard enough to witness—
Now you fall.

I don't want a stumbling God.
I don't want a God who ends up in the dirt.

Yet there is something compelling here.
I'll walk a little farther.

Station 4: Jesus Sees His Mother

In Her Image....

He looked down and for a moment
the agony that shook his body split open—
it was her face that broke the darkness
and spoke to him the beauty of his life.

How he cradled in her womb
as the donkey bounced to Bethlehem,
then the cradle of her arms
as they took the road to Egypt— to safety—
of the many ways she'd loved him
and let him go in God.

Now she stood with her friends and his
refusing the safety of not seeing, and he loved her—
so many memories of goodness
lit the space between them—
"John", he said before the agony closed in again,
"be to her, her son."

Station 5: Simon Compelled to Carry the Cross

That hand, Jesus—

How big it must have looked to you,
a human hand stretched out
lifting your burden.

Hand of one unknown to you,
a hand in the crowd of mixed intentions.
Hand compelled by love or virtue or

simply the rule of current law,
but hand interrupting the circle of violence
in one small opportunity;
For one large moment:
Hand of God.

Station 6: His Face Washed by Veronica

The sweat salted his face, stung his eyes
as he tried to see beyond the pain to the path
to the rocky ground and the crowd friends
and enemies and those attracted
by the drama of the hour.

"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani."

Then he saw her stepping forward
from the faces moving in and out of focus.
She reached toward him
holding up both hands to keep her balance
stretching upward to reach his face
her eyes hidden by the cloth
cloth to clear the sweat
cloth to bring the touch of comfort
cloth to companion him on his journey

Station 7: Jesus Falls a Second Time

Your mother, Jesus— staying with you,
and the woman who reached up to you
with a simple piece of cloth—
Love given and received.
Somehow it is not the pain
and the violence that affects me now
but something more important—
something more eternal than this moment.

Station 8: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

I had to be there.

It seemed unusually hot and dusty.

Maybe it was the pain
and the anger I felt around me and inside.

I brought my children.

There was no one to watch out for them.

Everyone was at the crucifixion spectacle,
and my children had seen violence from soldiers.

With me, at least they could hold my hands
and I could comfort them against his pain,
for we had grown to love Jesus.

I thought, "I can keep them safe."

But can I keep them safe in a world
that would do this to Jesus?

I remember what he said,

"Do not weep for me, but for yourselves
and for your children." He loved us—
it was obvious from the time we met him
when he played with the children
when we heard him listening to us.

With all his suffering
he let us know his love for us
could not be washed away by pain—
though perhaps it was this deep regard he had for us,
the women and our children,
that brought him to this road.

We didn't stay long.

If I cannot keep the children safe
at least I could bring them home
and comfort their hearts,

listen to them as Jesus did.
Maybe someday It will be enough.

Station 9: Jesus Falls the Third Time

Your weakness grows more evident, Jesus.
You fall again.

The women of Jerusalem who cried for you—
wept—reached out—you thought of them,
not yourself. I will not abandon a God
who stumbles for all the right reasons.

We're almost to the hill.

Station 10: Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

Ever since the time of Eden
when they knew their nakedness, clothing
has touched the layer between the world and the soul—
What more than life itself could be taken from us?
They stripped him of his garments.

Station 11: Crucified

Father, forgive them, all and each.
It is done.
Into your hands.
Peace.

Station 12: Death on the Cross

The heart of flesh
has done its work.
Earth and heaven join.
Time joins timeless.

Station 13: Body Taken Down From the Cross

I joined this walk at its beginning
and now the end has come, Jesus.
The dust clings to your body now

because you did not hide from
what you knew of God,
and you spoke it clearly.
I claim your journey as my own.

Station 14: Jesus Is Laid in The Tomb

What if Jesus couldn't rise
held in that tomb because he
wanted to change the world the way
he thought it should have worked.

Suppose he'd said to Papa-God,
"I'll do it this way or not at all"
and made himself a tomb-space
where he could life forever dead.

What if he had rolled himself into
despair inside that sepulcher...
curled around his anger cold or hot,
about a world so unredeemable
it chose to kill him.



Jesus, your courage!
Even in the cold and darkness of a tomb
you still could give your "yes" to God
your "yes" to life
your "yes" to resurrection.

May I who choose
to follow you
do no less.

