



THE SOUL'S JOURNEY

An Artist's Approach to the
Stations of the Cross

Artwork and Text by Kathrin Burleson

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III

JESUS IS BETRAYED AND ARRESTED

Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, **'The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.'** So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, **'Rabbi!'** and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him.

– Mark 14:43-46



Betrayal is above all an act of passion. It can never be an apathetic response, a deed of carelessness or ignorance. In the same way that hate is not the opposite of love, neither is betrayal. Judas makes his commitment out of passion, though we're never quite sure what has hold of his heart.

The heart of God is grievously wounded, and this image does justice to the explosion and exploitation unleashed in Judas's passion. And yet, at the same time, the beating heart of the Divine continues to give life to the world—for the passion that underlies all creation will not cease, in spite of bent intention and bodies broken.

The dendritic fingers reaching into the heart's core, or growing out of it, are sign and sacrament of the ceaseless action of the holy. Are they divine yearning for greater and more abundant life? Lament at life misused and diverted? The already-growing greenness of healing and resurrection? Are these tendrils like the placental exchange embracing and enlivening new creation in the womb, in spite of the apparent cost to the one who harbors new life?

The kiss of Judas cannot remain wholly corrupted in the heart of God's intention. It will pass into death, and through it, but it will not end there. The crowd's swords and clubs may seek death and destruction, not

knowing that this death will never yield the finality they seek. The hands laid violently on the Rabbi may seek to subvert his passion, but they cannot extinguish it, for its source is in the heart of God. Hands are meant to heal, not harm, to bless and not to bloody, to bring forth life from the womb, and the passion behind the seekers of destruction will not disappear into nothingness. Its chaotic energy will ultimately be turned and redeemed for creative life in the depths of the divine heart.

How will we receive hands, or kisses, or words that seek less than the life-giving gift of the Holy One? Can we see the possibility for divine passion buried within warped attempts to subvert life? And in the depths of our own vulnerability, can our will yield misdirected passion to the greater and only source of life? Will we participate in the transformation of passion?

PRESIDING BISHOP
KATHARINE JEFFERTS SCHORI

BETRAYAL

During the lengthy process of contemplating each station, this was perhaps the most challenging. How could I create the image of someone who has one of the most heinous roles imaginable? One of Jesus' closest and dearest friends has turned him over to his enemies and ultimately to death.

When I began my reflection on this station, I focused on Judas as a greedy and ungrateful man who betrayed his friend. But soon I realized this focus didn't move me beyond judgment and outrage. Yes, Judas was a traitor. But what else? And where did I fit into the story?

I began to realize how tempting it is for us to focus on faults of other people, to wonder about their motivations or to get caught up in their stories. When I have been let down or betrayed, I usually let emotions of sorrow and anger govern my response instead of considering the larger picture. It is entirely too easy to spend my energy judging the perceived perpetrator. Yet, all this does is hook me into situation that I can do nothing about; this

judgment keeps me firmly in a place with no exit, a place where it is all about me. When we get caught in the need to blame or condemn, we get stuck.

As I opened my heart to the subject of betrayal, I thought about people who had betrayed me over the years. Much to my dismay, I remembered them all too well. As many of the painful details came flooding back, I found myself slipping into the same sense of indignation and hurt that I had experienced many years ago. What a disappointment to realize I had hung on to and nurtured those hurts and those feelings for all of those years. Forgiveness? I thought I had forgiven, but if that were the case, how could the hurts be

so easily resurrected? Isn't this a betrayal on my part? A betrayal of my faith and of the example of forgiveness given by Christ? I say the Lord's Prayer nearly every day, including the sentence, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." But I seem to have missed the point. I have said the words of forgiveness but not meant them. In this way, I have betrayed myself—and my God.

As I moved deeper into reflection, I became even more uncomfortable as I thought of myself as Judas. I suspect that most of us can recall times when we betrayed someone. The betrayals may have been deliberate or just thoughtless, but they happened nonetheless. We may have a complicated rationale for what we did, or failed to do, but sometimes we just dropped the ball or didn't realize the implications of our actions.

What's so compelling about this station is that all of us can relate to each role in this drama: betrayed and betrayer. And while it is helpful to review our lives, and acknowledge our mistakes, it is important to see the greater truths in this narrative. This is the strength and power of the Way of the Cross. It gives us insights into personal interactions and helps us see beyond our limited vision and understanding.

Shortly after I finished painting this station, I showed it to some friends. Deeply spiritual and sensitive people, they were clear that this painting was not simply about betrayal. This is about the arrest, they said. It is bigger than betrayal. It is about the world closing in on someone.

Often others will see something in a painting that I didn't even realize was there. This was no exception. The garden has been a place of refuge, a place where Jesus seeks comfort, but it suddenly becomes the site of

the turning point in his journey. The arrest is the moment when the world takes over, and from here on, events cascade to his ultimate fate. We know how the story ends, that Jesus' fate is not what we might ordinarily expect—an important reminder when we feel as if our own world is closing in on us. But in the midst of the drama and pain, this is a difficult concept to hold on to.

I wonder about the vilification of Judas. After all, the hopeful ending to the Way of the Cross, the Resurrection, would never have happened unless the drama unfolded as it did. There needed to be a catalyst, something or someone who started the ball rolling. Judas was that catalyst. Just as we can never know the particulars or definite truth about Judas, we can never really know what happens in the heart of anyone else. It is difficult enough to understand ourselves and our own motivations, let alone those of another person. What is accomplished by focusing on others and their betrayal? How can we truly heal when we focus only on the hurt and pain caused by another?

This station shows us another way forward: to allow hurt and adversity help us transcend attachment to things of this world—our loved ones, culture, or comfort. Ultimately, this is our task—to see beyond this moment, this person, these circumstances, and to release our destiny to God. As I completed this chapter, I read these words, excerpts from a song, "Wash Your Spirit Clean" by the Native American group, Walela.

Be grateful for the struggle.
Be thankful for the lessons.
And you'll wash your spirit clean.
And you'll wash your spirit clean.

PRAYER

“ God of peace, help me to forgive those who hurt or betray me and strengthen me to be worthy of others’ trust in me. Let your steadfast love and compassion flow through me that I may be your presence in this world. Help me to see beyond the pain of this moment to your divine plan. **Amen.**”



V

THE SOLDIERS MOCK JESUS

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, **'Hail, King of the Jews!'** and striking him on the face.

– John 19:1-3



The Stations of the Cross had not been a significant part of my devotional life, especially the ones that are painfully realistic. When Kathrin began working on the stations, I wasn't interested until I saw that she was doing an impressionistic representation in which Jesus, the Holy One, was depicted as light. I saw this station early in her process and was immediately moved by it. It seemed to draw me into the story and beyond it.

The crown of thorns is a powerful symbol. I try to imagine what the soldiers were doing and thinking as they were making it. Why make it of thorns? Was that the easiest material to find? Perhaps so. But thorns are difficult to work with and must have caused some pain in making it. Were the soldiers thinking about making a crown that might inflict as much pain as possible? Were they just following orders? Or was this crown of thorns their idea, their contribution to the Crucifixion? The crown is a powerful symbol of both royalty and divinity. Did they realize the full implications of what they were doing?

This representation of the crown with its wicked thorns anchors us not only in the painful reality of the situation in which Jesus was caught, but it also immediately draws us into the immensity of the reality beyond

it—into God's divine energy of love that fills the universe. We are not alone, caught on the pain of the thorns of difficult or humiliating situations. God's light of love surrounds us, upholds us, and draws us into its center to sustain us and to lift us beyond the thorns so that we may be empowered to deal with these situations as best we can. That divine light that we see through the window of the thorns draws us ever beyond ourselves into the dazzling mystery of love.

I wonder if the soldiers who created that crown were touched by the power and intensity of that love and presence, even as they attempted to torture him? I think they must have been.

SISTER TERESA MARIE MARTIN

HUMILIATION

I completed this painting first. I had experimented with various approaches—figurative, narrative, abstract—but none seemed to click. It just didn't feel right to work with specific figures or images, since the real power of the story was the way it touches each of us in the here and now.

In this particular station, I knew the depiction of individuals would be a distraction. But I needed a recognizable image. I wanted to find the essence of each station, the part that speaks to each of us personally. Quite honestly, I was a little surprised that this station, which at first glance seemed the most difficult, would open that door. But then, this experience expresses what the Way of the Cross is about—a passage to another reality.

I find inspiration for art in unexpected places. One might think that inspiration is only found in great works of art, famous historical sites, or profound experiences. More often than not, the mundane or common holds the most gold for me. Many years ago, my husband and I were traveling in France and stopped at

a small gallery in a village in Brittany where a student was exhibiting oil paintings. They were fairly primitive paintings done on bed sheets—an economical way to paint but not a medium with a lot of archival promise. The paintings were obviously beginning attempts of a young artist, but they had life and energy. One of the paintings that really spoke to me showed ladders leaning against the sky, going up to doorways. It was simple, but the concept resonated with me.

I loved the idea of punching a hole in the sky, of going to another reality. I confess that I stole the idea and have played with it in my own work for many years. In fact, I even have a two-foot-long ladder leaning against the wall of my studio. To some, it might seem like

kitsch or junk, but to me it is an invitation to go beyond, to enter another place, which is really at the heart of my art and my faith.

As the passage tells us, Jesus is now at the mercy of his captors. Bit by bit, his support has fallen away, until he is now the object of derision and hatred. Even more, he is humiliated by the soldiers who force him to wear a crown of thorns—a distorted and cruel mockery for an innocent man.

Of all the elements of this part of the story, I began to focus on the crown of thorns. We generally think of crowns as beautiful objects made of precious materials—gold, studded with diamonds or other precious gemstones. But in this case, the crown of thorns is the exact opposite. Thorns are earthy and dangerous. We speak of someone as a thorn in our side, or we find ourselves in a thorny situation. For Jesus, the crown of thorns was an excruciating prelude to torture and his eventual Crucifixion.

A crown also symbolizes a link between the individual and the divine, between heaven and earth. Royalty wear crowns because of the traditional belief that they are close to divine, or even divine themselves. The crown represents the connection between the wearer and God. In looking at the body through a metaphysical lens, the top of head, or seventh chakra, is called the crown—a link to the divine.

The crown of thorns symbolizes another step in the transformation of Jesus. While the crown connects Jesus to the earth through the thorns, it is also a connection with the divine. Jesus is on the path to death and Resurrection, to being at the right hand of God the Father. While we likely won't ever wear a crown of thorns, we can relate to the transforming power of pain and humiliation. Often the difficulties of life serve as catalysts that force us to move out of our ego and to face the world

from a deeper and wider place in our hearts. When we are brought to that place where we think we have no choices left, we often realize that the one right choice was there all along—the choice of surrender to God. And when we are willing to do that, the world beyond opens up for us. As John Peterson states so well in his book, *A Walk in Jerusalem*, this is the “Divine Reversal,” the first sign that through Jesus, God is going to turn everything upside down.

We often hear of people who have been grateful for a life-threatening disease, or a close encounter with death. A friend told me of her experience when she was a young mother. She was not yet thirty years old, with three small children, when she discovered that she had breast cancer. This was in the 1970s when cancer treatment was still experimental and the prognosis was not good. Her husband, unable to cope with the stress and pain, abandoned the family. She was on her own, alone, and frightened. The odds of her survival were slim. Fortunately, she survived the cancer and went on to raise her family and live a full and creative life. Now in her sixties, she doesn't look back to those frightening times with anger or bitterness. She sees them as a time when God turned everything upside down for her and her children. Before the diagnosis, she was living a life of relative ease, taking things for granted, and not paying much attention to God. She was the center of her own comfortable universe. Finding herself alone in a difficult position, with an uncertain future, forced her to see that things were not as she had believed. Another reality opened up for her, and she saw things from a different perspective, one that did not have her immediate concerns at its core. As is so often the case, the pain and challenges of life opened a window to another reality.

PRAYER

“ Merciful God, be with me in times of humiliation and despair. Give me hope, and let me know that I am always worthy in your sight. Clothe me in your love. **Amen.**”