

The First Station

Jesus is condemned to death

Pontius Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and after having Jesus whipped he handed him over to be crucified. (Mark 15:15)



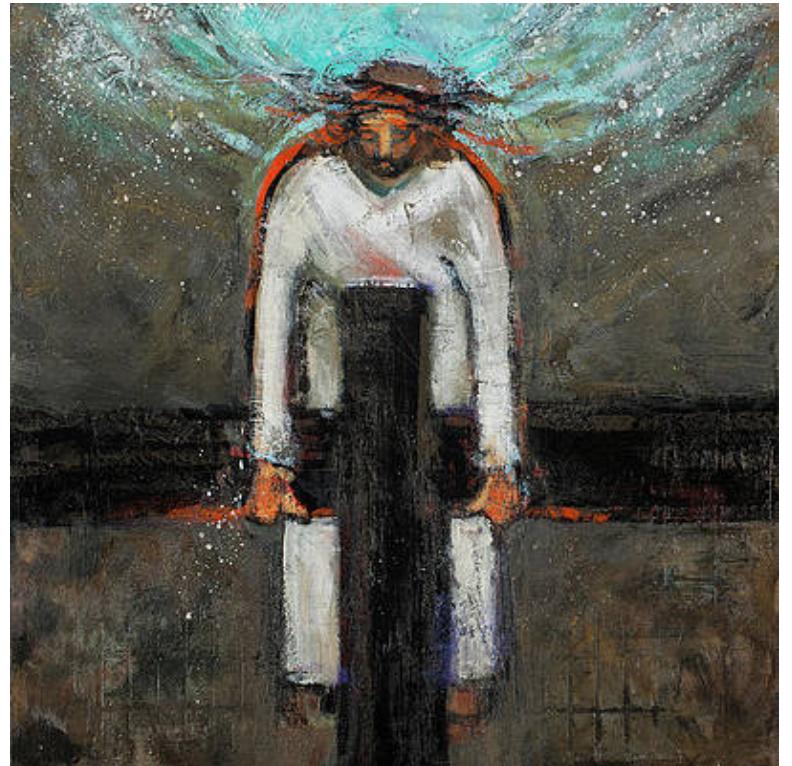
Peter Attwood is the first person in the UK to die of COVID-19, on January 30th 2020. His death was originally recorded as pneumonia but testing of his lung tissue confirms the presence of the virus. His daughter Jane Buckland recalls the last time she saw him alive in hospital: ‘The last thing he said was, “Go on, off you go...” and I said, “Love you, see you tomorrow...” and that was it.’

Jesus stands in the most human of places. He has already experienced profound solidarity with so many on this earth, by being beaten and tortured. Now he is wrongfully condemned to punishment by death. His commitment to entering our lives completely begins its final steps. He has said "yes" to God and placed his life in God's hands. We follow him in this final surrender, and contemplate with reverence each place along the way, as he is broken and given for us.

The Second Station

Jesus takes up his cross

Jesus took up his cross by himself and he went out to the place called The Place of the Skull which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. (John 19:17)



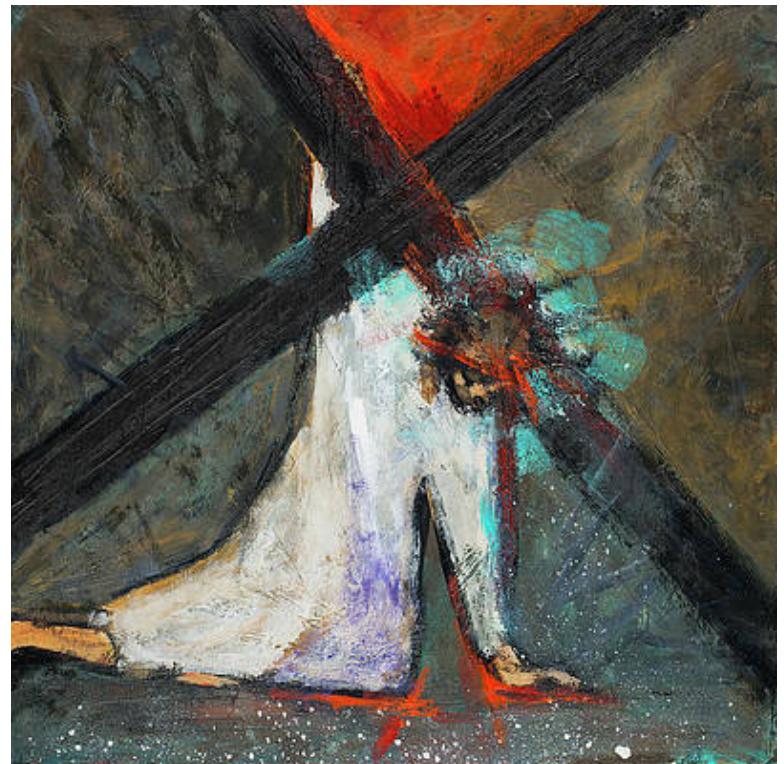
By March 2020, confirmed cases in the UK exceed 100 and England's Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty tells M.Ps that the UK's response to COVID-19 has moved on to the second stage: from "containment" to "delay". Thousands of retired doctors and nurses are recruited to assist an already overburdened NHS.

Jesus is made to carry the cross on which he will die. It represents the weight of all our crosses. What he must have felt as he first took it upon his shoulders! With each step he enters more deeply into our human experience. He walks in the path of human misery and suffering, and experiences its crushing weight.

The Third Station

Jesus falls for the first time

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies it bears much fruit. (John 12:24)



24th March 2020: Boris Johnson announces a National Lockdown for the first time. School buildings are closed to the majority of pupils. Non-essential shops, cafes, pubs and gyms also close.

The weight is unbearable. Jesus falls under it. How could he enter our lives completely without surrendering to the crushing weight of the life of so many on this earth! He lies on the ground and knows the experience of weakness beneath unfair burdens. He feels the powerlessness of wondering if he will ever be able to continue. He is pulled up and made to continue.

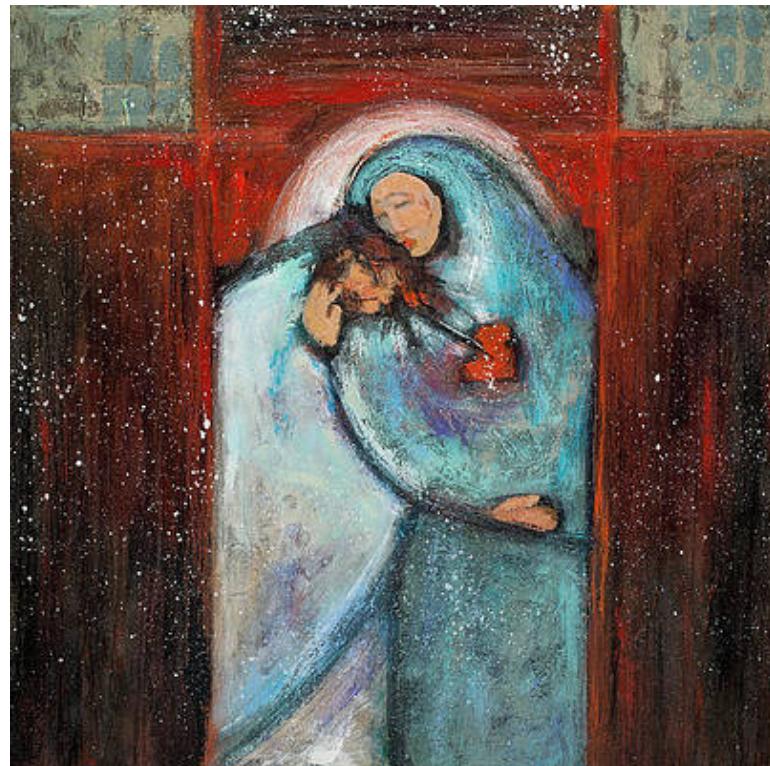
The Fourth Station

Jesus meets his mother

By the cross of Jesus stood Mary, his mother. (John 19:25)



People see their relatives in care homes through the windows but aren't allowed inside due to Covid restrictions.

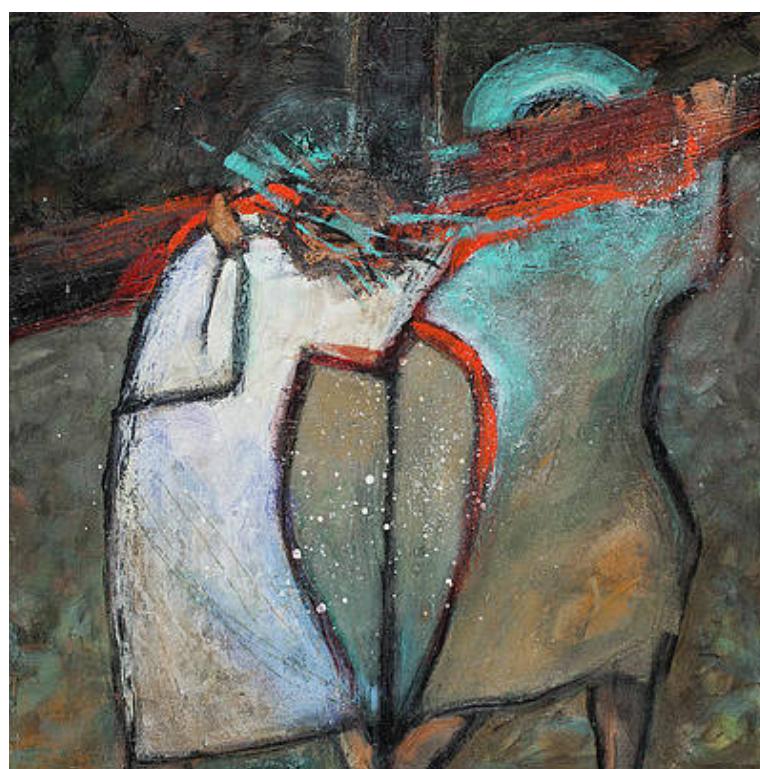


Jesus' path takes him to a powerful source of his strength to continue. All his life, his mother had taught him the meaning of the words, "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord." Now they look into each other's eyes. How pierced-through her heart must be! How pained he must be to see her tears! Now, her grace-filled smile blesses his mission and stirs his heart to its depth. Love and trust in God bind them together.

The Fifth Station

Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry his cross

By the cross of Jesus stood Mary, his mother. (John 19:25)



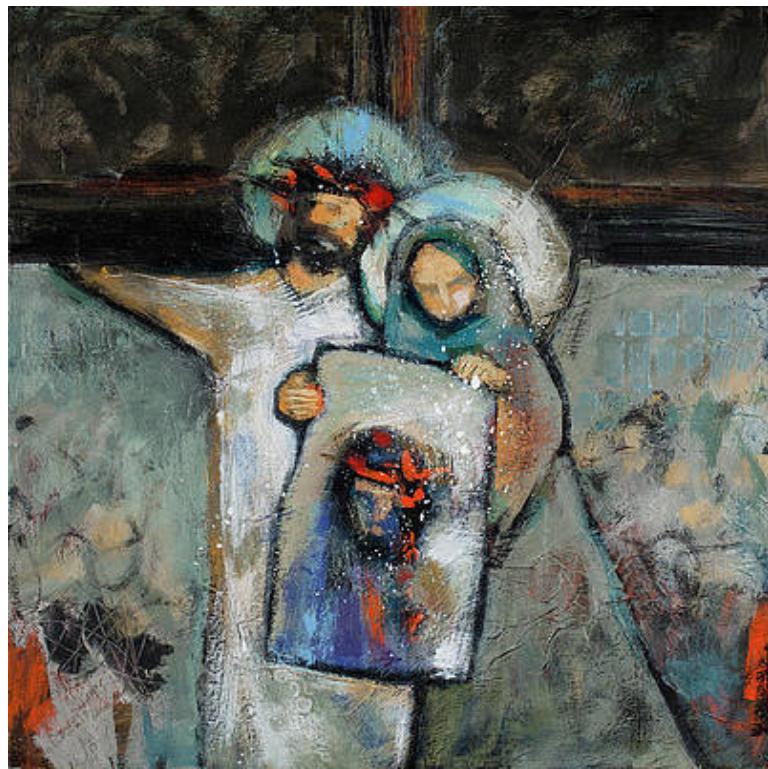
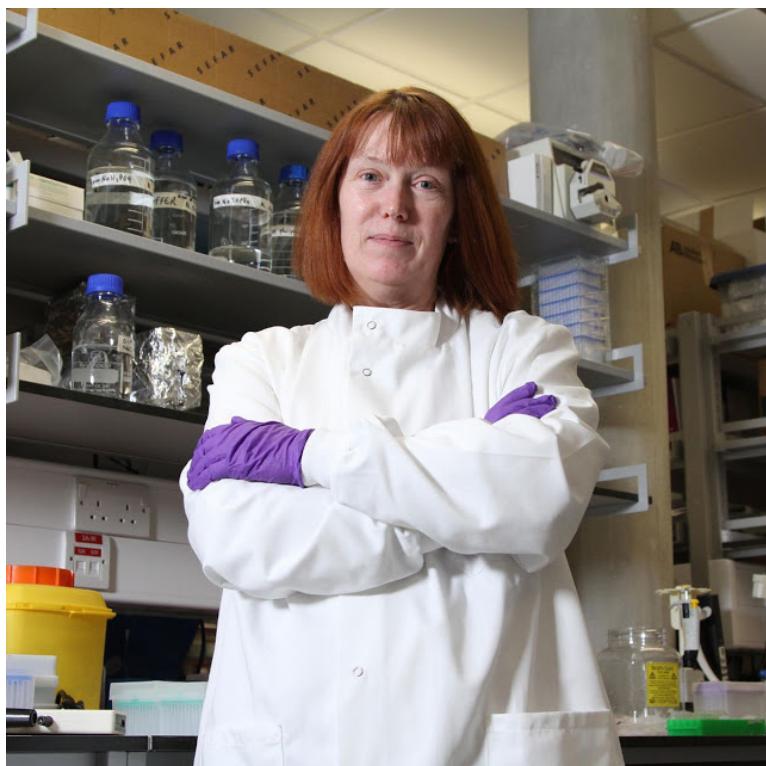
Footballer Marcus Rashford instigates and leads a national campaign to end child food poverty by asking the government to provide lunches to children from low-income families during the holidays.

Jesus even experiences our struggle to receive help. He is made to experience the poverty of not being able to carry his burden alone. He enters into the experience of all who must depend upon others to survive. He is deprived of the satisfaction of carrying this burden on his own.

The Sixth Station

Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

He was despised and rejected; a man of suffering and acquainted with grief. (Isaiah 53:3)



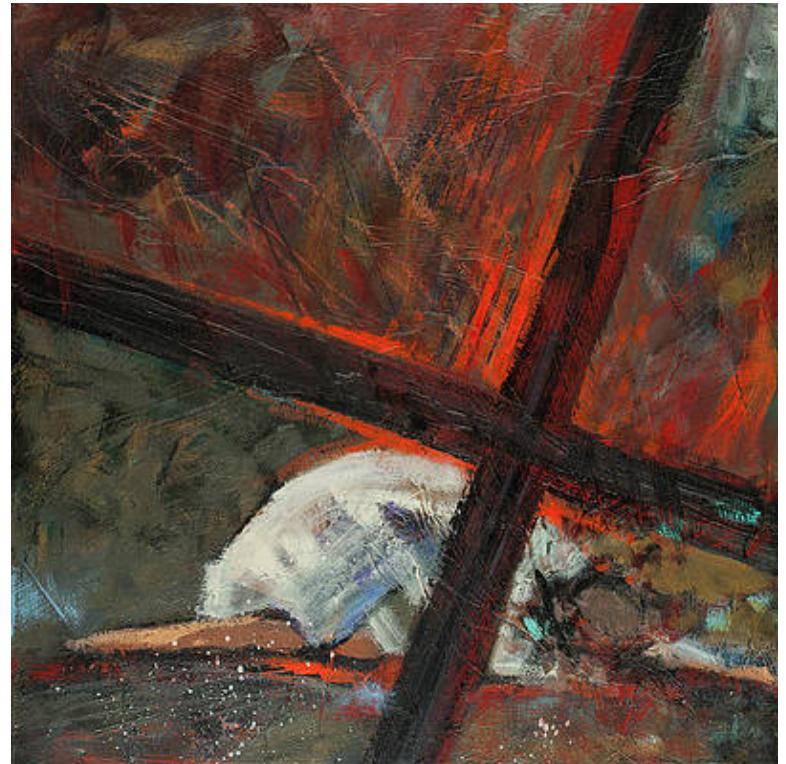
Professor Sarah Gilbert designs the Oxford vaccine, which by late November 2020, trials suggests is at least 70% effective at preventing Covid-19 symptoms and 90% effective with a second dose. To date more than 18 million people in the UK have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine - part of the biggest inoculation programme the country has ever launched.

Jesus' journey is at times brutal. He has entered into the terrible experiences of rejection and injustice. He has been whipped and beaten. His face shows the signs of his solidarity with all who have ever suffered injustice and vile, abusive treatment. He encounters a compassionate, loving disciple who wipes the vulgar spit and mocking blood from his face. On her veil, she discovers the image of his face - his gift to her. And, for us to contemplate forever.

The Seventh Station

Jesus falls for the second time

Jesus said, "If any of you want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24)



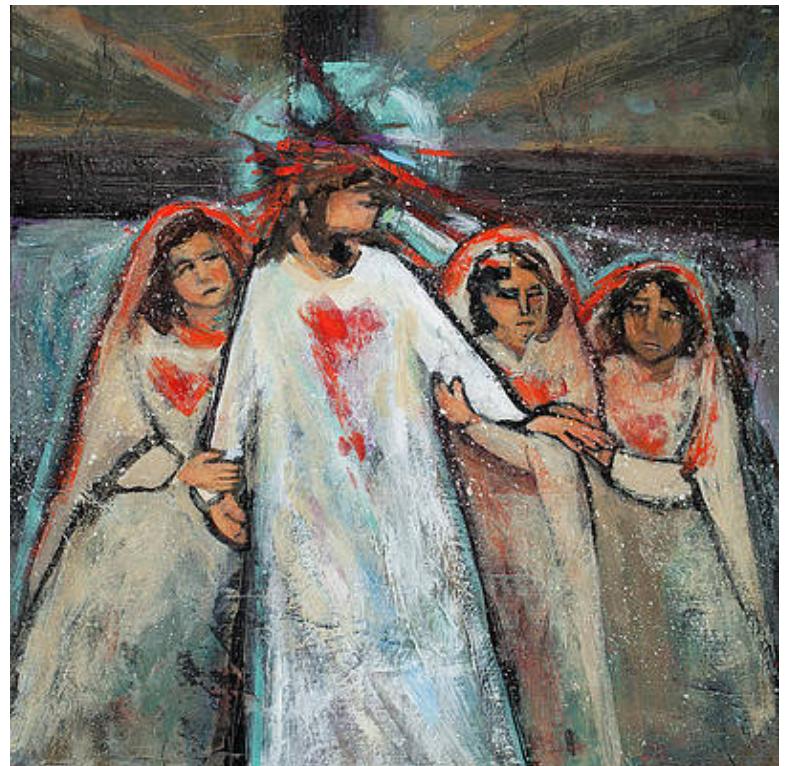
On October 31st Boris Johnson announces a second National Lockdown for England to prevent a "medical and moral disaster" for the NHS.

Even with help, Jesus stumbles and falls to the ground. In deep exhaustion he stares at the earth beneath him. "Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return." He has seen death before. Now he can feel the profound weakness of disability and disease and aging itself, there on his knees, under the weight of his cross.

The Eighth Station

Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem

A great number of people followed him including women who were weeping and wailing for him. Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me but weep for yourselves and for your children.” (Luke 23:27-28)



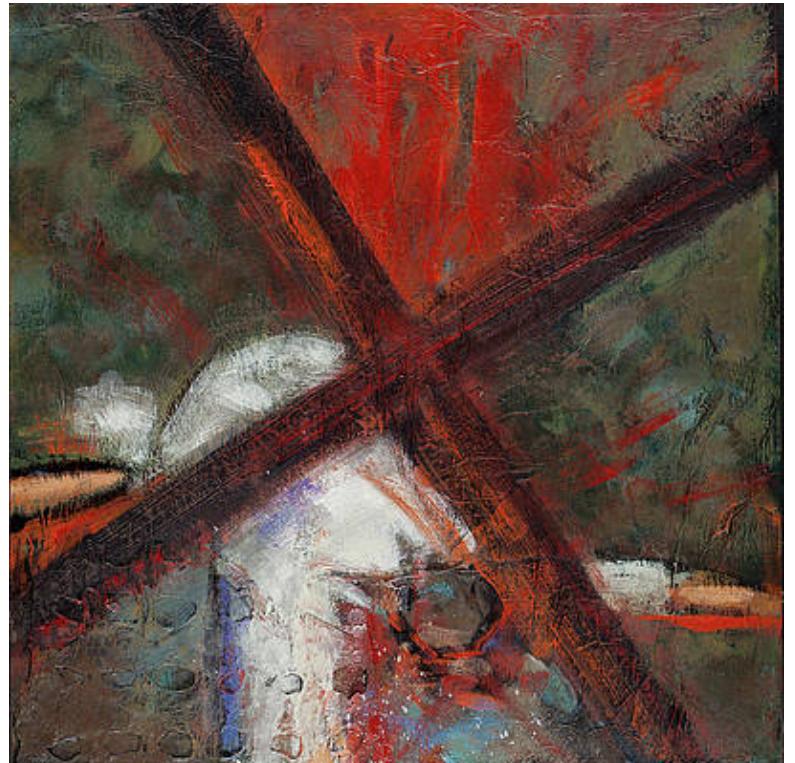
Campaigners call on NHS Trusts to allow pregnant women to have their partners with them to appointments and scans, after it was revealed three quarters of NHS Trusts had banned them from attending, leading to women experiencing traumas like miscarriage without partner support.

The women of Jerusalem, and their children, come out to comfort and thank him. They had seen his compassion and welcomed his words of healing and freedom. He had broken all kinds of social and religious conventions to connect with them. Now they are here to support him. He feels their grief. He suffers, knowing he can't remain to help them more in this life. He knows the mystery of facing the separation of death.

The Ninth Station

Jesus falls for the third time

Jesus said, "Come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:28-29)



January 5th: A third lockdown is announced for England. Similar restrictions are imposed for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. School buildings are closed to the majority of children and young people, with some (but by no means all) offering live online lessons. Anne Longfield, The Children's Commissioner for England, publishes a report which indicates that the damage to children's mental health caused by the pandemic, could last for years.

This last fall is devastating. Jesus can barely proceed to the end. Summoning all this remaining strength, supported by his inner trust in God, Jesus collapses under the weight of the cross. His executioners look at him as a broken man, pathetic yet paying a price he deserves. They help him up so he can make it up the hill of crucifixion.

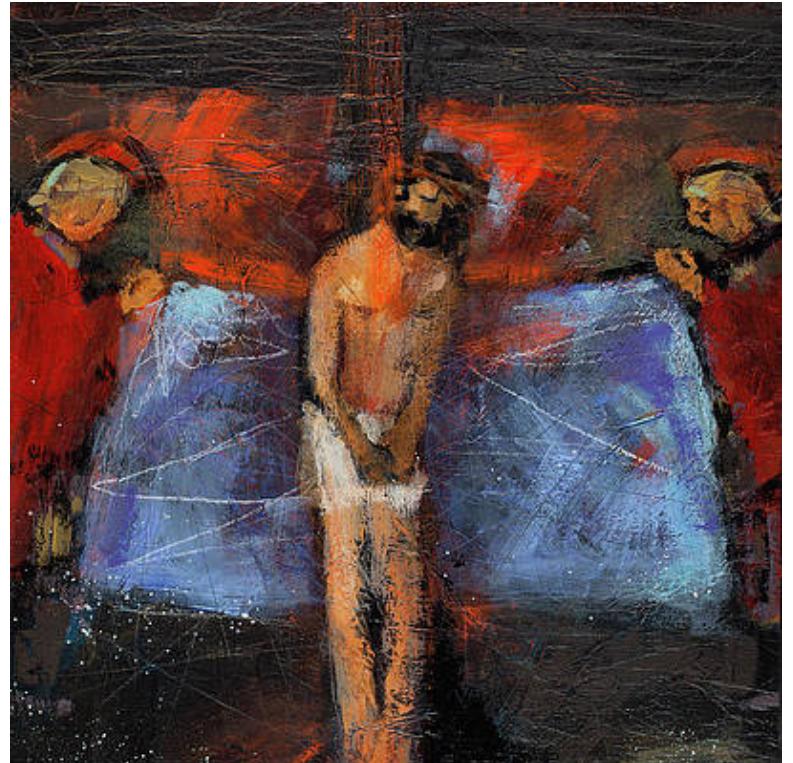
The Tenth Station

Jesus is stripped naked

They divided his clothes among them and cast lots to decide what each should take. (Mark 15:24)



By late January there are twice as many patients in hospital with Covid than there were at the peak during the first lockdown.



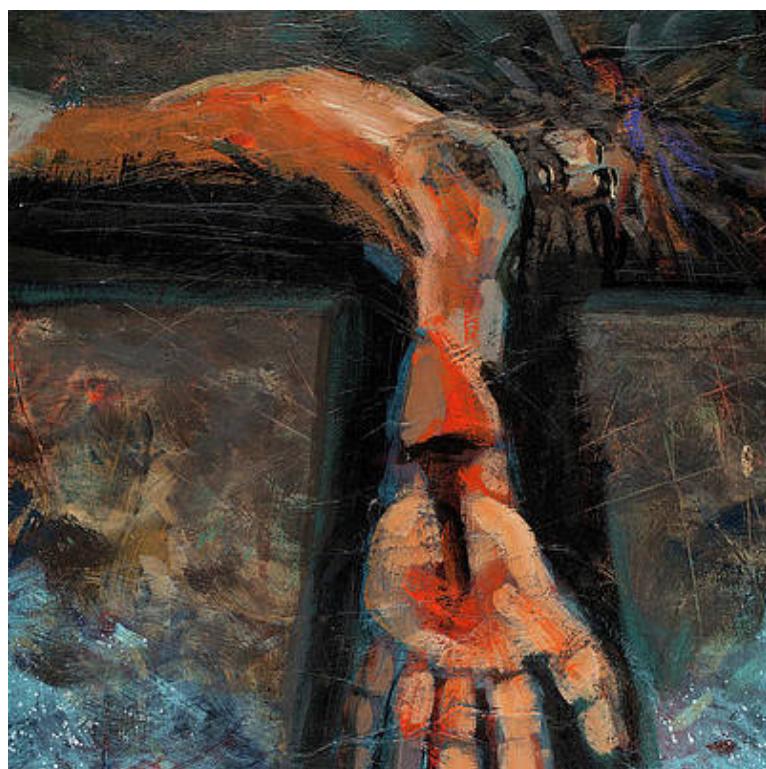
Part of the indignity is to be crucified naked. Jesus is completely stripped of any pride. The wounds on his back are torn open again. He experiences the ultimate vulnerability of the defenceless. No shield or security protects him. As they stare at him, his eyes turn to heaven.

The Eleventh Station

Jesus is nailed to the cross

When they came to The Place of the Skull which in Hebrew is called Golgotha there they crucified Jesus with two criminals, one on his right hand and one on his left.

(Luke 23:33)



Mental health charity Mencap receives reports from people with learning disabilities that they had been told they would not be resuscitated if they were taken ill with Covid.

Huge nails are hammered through his hands and feet to fix him on the cross. He is bleeding much more seriously now. As the cross is lifted up, the weight of his life hangs on those nails. Every time he struggles to pull himself up to breathe, his ability to cling to life slips away.

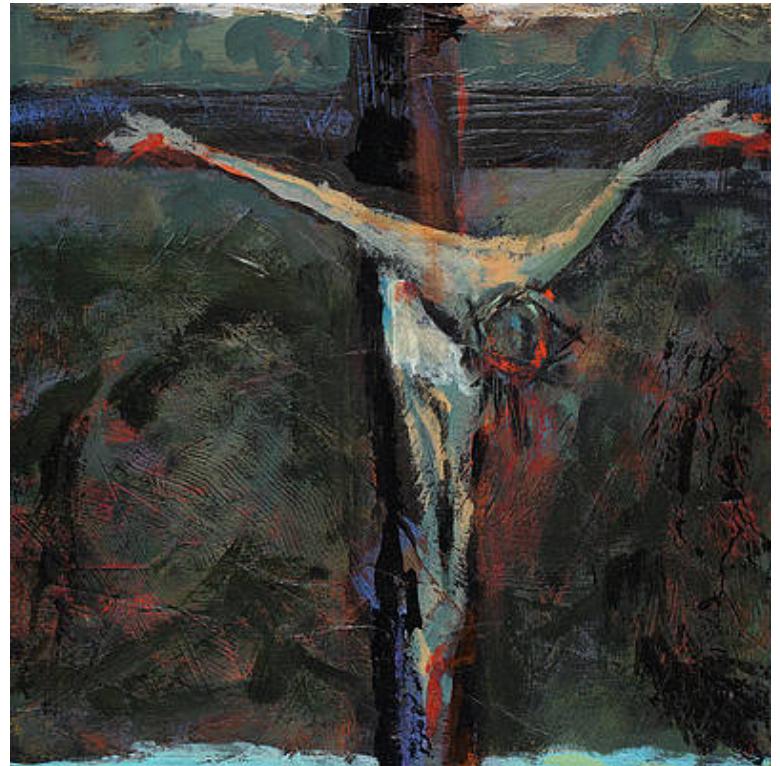
The Twelfth Station

Jesus dies on the cross

It was now about noon and darkness came over all the land until three in the afternoon. The sun's light failed and the veil of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, shouted out in a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." And he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44-46)



The UK death rate surpasses 100,000.

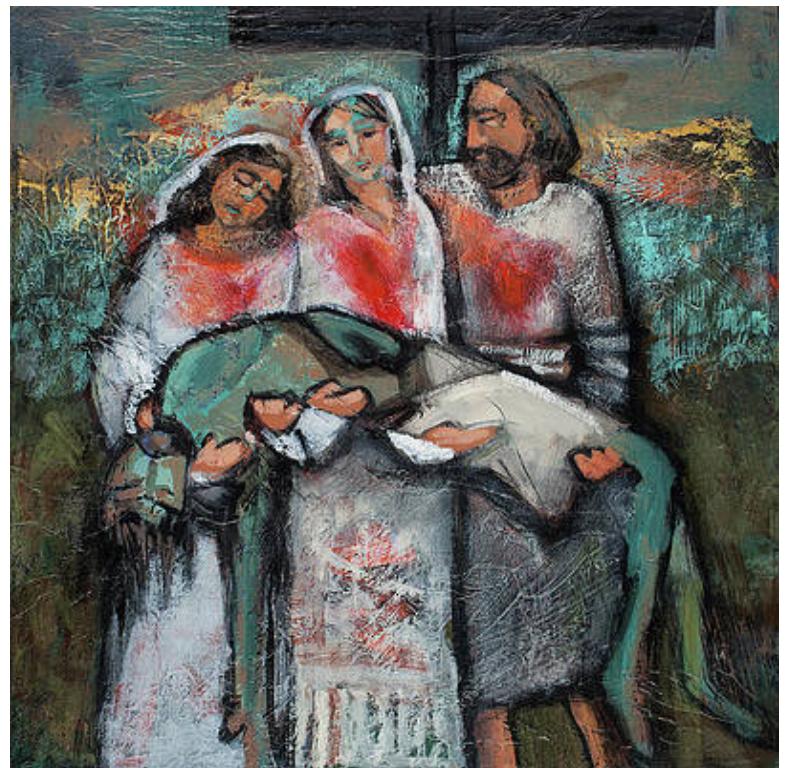


Between two criminals, a mocking title above his head, with only Mary and John and Mary Magdalene to support him, Jesus surrenders his last breath: "Into your hands I commend my spirit."

The Thirteenth Station

The body of Jesus is taken down from the cross

The soldiers came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead. They therefore did not break his legs but instead one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once there came out blood and water. After this Joseph of Arimathea obtained permission from Pontius Pilate to take away the body of Jesus. (John 19:33-35; 38)



As the death rate increases, temporary morgues are set up to cope with the dead.

What tender mourning! Jesus' lifeless body lies in his mother's arms. He has truly died. A profound sacrifice, complete.

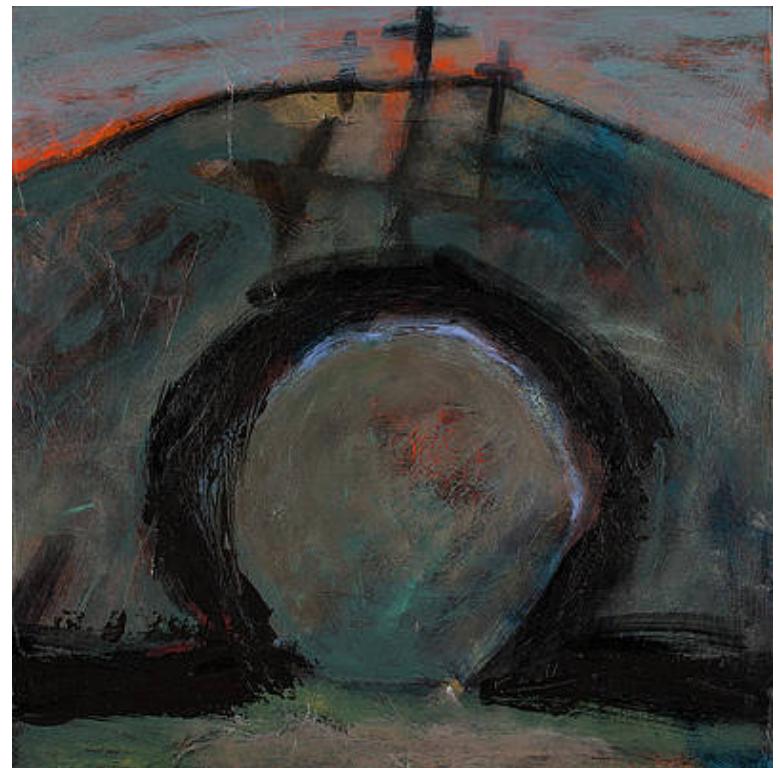
The Fourteenth Station

The body of Jesus is laid in the tomb

Joseph of Arimathea bought a linen cloth, took down the body of Jesus from the cross, wrapped it in the linen cloth and laid it in a tomb which had been hewn out of the rock. Finally he placed a large stone across the entrance of the tomb. (Mark 15:46)



Information card from a funeral:
Throughout the pandemic relatives have had to mourn the dead without being able to receive physical comfort from the living.



The huge stone over the tomb is the final sign of the permanence of death. In this final act of surrender, who would have imagined this tomb would soon be empty or that Jesus would show himself alive to his disciples, or that they would recognize him in the breaking of bread? Oh, that our hearts might burn within us, as we realize how he had to suffer and die so as to enter into his glory, for us.