

Fall Creek Abbey Lent Retreats 2021



Image above painted by Chandra Savaso and borrowed from her Instagram at https://www.instagram.com/p/CH2Q-5bnd0Y/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

“I Call You Friends.”
John 15:15

Welcome, welcome! It’s good to have you at Fall Creek Abbey and to support your desire to join with other Christian pilgrims during this Lenten vigil as we reflect on Christ’s death and resurrection.

The theme of this Holy Week retreat guide is **deepening your friendship with Jesus through experiencing empathy for him in his suffering.**

Before you begin this guide, it’s always helpful to notice how you are coming to this time. Take a moment and do a self-scan:

- What problems, fears, concerns, or other life situations am I bringing with me to this retreat?
- What emotions am I experiencing? How do I feel about being here?
- How would I describe the condition of my body? How do I feel in my body right now?

- What questions am I currently asking God that I'd really like answered?

- What are my identifiable longings or desires for this time of retreat?

After you have finished responding, follow these prompts:

- Place your hands on your lap, palms open
- Take three to five deep cleansing breaths
- Turn your attention to God in prayer, imagining what is real and true—that God is right here with you, warmly responding to you, and fully attentive to you
- Release to the Lord whatever burden you carry that might distract you from your intention to be with Jesus
- Ask the Holy Spirit to be your companion, strengthening you as you begin your Holy Week retreat

What Deepens a Friendship?

The theme for your retreat is about deepening your friendship with Jesus. So, what is it that typically deepens a friendship? Take a moment and think about your closest, dearest friends. As they come to mind, reflect on what has happened between you that has formed an intimate bond with them. Write down your thoughts.

A deepening friendship with Jesus is developed in similar ways to a human friendship. It involves intentional time together, honest and vulnerable conversations—both listening and talking, and shared experiences. Does that resemble what came to your mind?

Deepening Your Friendship with Jesus

1. During your retreat, you will be guided into prayer experiences where you observe Jesus through the gospels and take in how he suffered. Your vantage point is as a friend, *as if you're watching one of your dearest friends suffer in this way. As if you were one among Jesus' closest friends, like Mary, Martha or Lazarus.*
2. After you slowly read and meditate on what Jesus went through, you will be invited to describe to Jesus (in second person) in writing and prayer what you witnessed. To talk with Jesus about what you saw him endure and how you were affected by what he went through. Here's an example of what that could look like:

"They spat on you and whipped you on the head with stiff reeds. I winced with each stroke knowing how tender the puncture wounds from the thorny crown would feel. I felt so angry that they treated you as if you were a lifeless piece of trash! And when they had their fill of mocking you, they pulled off, peeled off, the scarlet cloak that was now stuck to your bleeding wounds. As much as their physical insensitivity hurt me to watch, the mocking tone of their voices made me feel sick, hopeless—as if evil were suffocating you and me.

3. You will conclude with what it is you want to say to Jesus after empathizing and sympathizing with him.

(The following excerpts represent a few of the “stations of the cross” and are a compilation of biblical passages from the transliteration of the Bible called The Voice.)

First Station: When You Were Alone in Your Anguish

Jesus led His disciples to the place called Gethsemane.

Jesus: *"I am going over there to pray and to think. You sit here while I'm at prayer."*

Then He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with Him, and He became deeply distressed and filled with sorrow.

Jesus: *"My heart is so heavy; I feel as if I could die. And my soul is overwhelmed with grief, to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me."*

He walked on a little farther. Then He threw Himself on the ground and prayed for deliverance from what was about to come.

Jesus: *"Abba, Father, this is the last thing I want. If there is any way, please take this bitter cup from Me so I don't have to drink from it. But whatever happens, let Your will be done – not mine."*

When He came back to the disciples, He saw that they were asleep. Peter awoke a little less confident and slightly chagrined.

Jesus (waking Peter): *"So you couldn't keep watch with Me for just one short hour? Now maybe you're learning: the spirit is willing, but the body is weak. Watch and pray and take care that you are not pulled down during a time of testing."*

With that, Jesus returned to His secluded spot to pray again. Pleading with God but surrendering his will.

Jesus: *“Father, if there is no other way for this cup to pass without My drinking it—then not My will, but Yours be done.”*

Again Jesus returned to His disciples and found them asleep. Their eyes were heavy-lidded. So Jesus left them again and returned to prayer, praying the same sentiments with the same words. Again He returned to His disciples.

And in His anguish, He prayed even more intensely, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Jesus: *“Well, you are still sleeping; are you getting a good long rest? Now the time has come; the Son of Man is just about to be given over to the betrayers and the sinners. Get up; we have to be going. The one who is going to betray Me is close by.”*

(Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:35-42, Luke 22:44)

1. Describe to Jesus what you saw him endure and how you were affected by his lonesome anguish. “I saw you... and I felt...”

2. What do you want to say to Jesus after empathizing with him?

Second Station: When You Were Betrayed by your Friends

After Jesus finished all His teaching, He said to His disciples,

Jesus: *“The feast of Passover begins in two days. That is when the Son of Man is handed over to be crucified.”*

So the disciples went to make arrangements for the Passover and then celebrated this most holy moment together one last time.

During their dinner, one of the twelve, Judas Iscariot, got up, left early and went to the chief priests.

Judas Iscariot: *“What will you give me to turn Him over to you?”*

They offered him 30 pieces of silver. And from that moment, he began to watch for a chance to betray Jesus.

A short while later...

There he was, Judas, one of the twelve leading a crowd of people from the chief priests and elders with swords and clubs; the chief priests and the elders were right there, ready to arrest Jesus. And Judas, the one who intended to betray Him, had said to the elders and the chief priests that he would give them a sign.

Judas Iscariot: *“I’ll greet Him with a kiss. And you will know that the one I kiss is the one you should arrest.”*

So at once, he went up to Jesus.

Judas Iscariot: *“Greetings, Teacher!”* (he kisses Him)

Jesus: *“My friend, do what you have come to do.”*

And at that, the company came and seized Him.

And at that, all the disciples ran away and abandoned Him.

(Matthew 26:1-2, 14-16, 47-50)

1. Describe to Jesus what you saw him endure and how you were affected when he was betrayed by his friends.

2. What do you want to say to Jesus after empathizing with him?

Third Station: When You Were Falsely Accused

The chief priests and other religious leaders called for witnesses against Jesus so they could execute Him. There were plenty of people willing to get up and accuse Jesus falsely, distorting what Jesus had said or done.

The high priest stood up and turned to Jesus.

High Priest: *“Do You have anything to say in Your own defense? What do You think of what all these people have said about You?”*

But Jesus held His peace and didn’t say a word.

High Priest: *“Are You God’s Anointed, the Liberating King, the Son of the Blessed One?”*

Jesus: *“I am.”*

Then the high priest tore his clothes.

High Priest (to the council): *“What else do we need to hear? You have heard the blasphemy from His own lips. What do you have to say about that?”*

The verdict was unanimous—Jesus was guilty of a capital crime.

So the people began to humiliate Him. Some even spat upon Him. Then He was blindfolded, and they slapped and punched Him.

At this point, the men who were holding Jesus began to mock Him and beat Him.

Men Holding Jesus: *“Hey, Prophet! Use Your prophetic powers to tell us who just whacked You!”*

They kept on with this sort of insulting, degrading treatment for quite some time.

When morning came, the chief priests met in council with all the Jewish leaders. They bound Jesus, led Him away, and turned Him over to the Roman governor, Pilate.

Now it was his custom at that feast that Pilate should release one prisoner from custody, whomever the people most desired. There was one rebel from those imprisoned for insurrection against the Roman occupation. He had committed murder during an uprising. His name was Barabbas. A crowd had gathered in front of Pilate's judgment seat to request that Pilate follow his usual custom.

Pilate turned to them.

Pilate: *"Why don't I release to you the King of the Jews?"*

He knew that the chief priests had delivered Jesus because they were threatened by Him, not because Jesus was a criminal.

But priests moved among the crowd and persuaded them to call for Barabbas instead.

Pilate: *"Then what do you want me to do with the King of the Jews?"*

Crowd: *"Crucify Him, crucify Him!"*

But now he called to them.

Pilate: *"Why? What has He done to deserve such a sentence?"*

Crowd (crying all the louder): *"Crucify Him, crucify Him!"*

When Pilate saw that he could not persuade the crowd to change its mind, he released Barabbas to them and had Jesus publicly whipped, which was the normal prelude to crucifixion.

The soldiers twisted thorny branches together as a crown and placed it onto His brow and wrapped Him in a purple cloth. They drew near to Him, shouting:

Soldiers (striking at Jesus): *"Bow down, everyone! This is the King of the Jews!"*

Then Jesus was paraded out before the people, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe.

Pilate: *"Here is the man!"*

Chief Priests and Officers (shouting): *"Crucify, crucify!"*

At last Pilate handed Him over to his soldiers, knowing that He would be executed.

(Mark 14:55-65, 15:1-15a, Luke 22:63-65, John 19:2-3, 5-6, 16)

1. Describe to Jesus what you saw him endure and how you were affected by him being falsely accused and sentenced to death.
2. What do you want to say to Jesus after empathizing with him?

Fourth Station: When you were Executed

On the way to the place of crucifixion, they pulled a man from the crowd—his name was Simon of Cyrene, a person from the countryside who happened to be entering the city at that moment. They put Jesus' cross on Simon's shoulders, and he followed behind Jesus. Along with Him was a huge crowd of common people, including many women shrieking and wailing in grief.

Jesus wasn't the only one being crucified that day. There were two others, criminals, who were also being led to their execution. When they came to the place known as "The Skull," they crucified Jesus there, in the company of criminals, one to the right of Jesus and the other to His left.

Jesus: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing."

Meanwhile they were drawing lots to see who would win Jesus' clothing. The crowd of people stood, watching.

Jesus' mother was standing next to His cross along with her sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus looked to see His mother and the disciple He loved standing nearby.

Jesus (to Mary, His mother): "Dear woman, this is your son (motioning to the beloved disciple)! (to John, His disciple) This is now your mother."

Authorities (mocking Jesus): "So He was supposed to rescue others, was He? He was supposed to be God's Anointed, the Liberating King? Let's see Him start by liberating Himself!"

The soldiers joined in the mockery. First, they pretended to offer Him a soothing drink—but it was sour wine.

Soldiers: "Hey, if You're the King of the Jews, why don't You free Yourself!"

Even the inscription they placed over Him was intended to mock Him—"This is the King of the Jews!"

One of the criminals joined in the cruel talk.

Cynical Criminal: "You're supposed to be the Anointed One, right? Well—do it! Rescue Yourself and us!"

But the other criminal told him to be quiet.

Believing Criminal: "Don't you have any fear of God at all? You're getting the same death sentence He is! We're getting what we deserve since we've committed crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong at all! (turning to Jesus) Jesus, when You come into Your kingdom, please remember me."

Jesus: "I promise you that this very day you will be with Me in paradise."

At noon, the day suddenly darkened for three hours across the entire land. Sometime around three o'clock Jesus called out in a loud voice.

Jesus: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

Jesus was speaking, as in the psalms, "My God, My God, why have You turned Your back on Me?"

Then Jesus cried out with a loud voice.

Jesus: *It is finished!*

And with those words, He took his last breath, exhaled—and breathed no more.

In that moment, His head fell; and He gave up the spirit.

(Luke 23:26-27, 32-46, John 19:25-27, 30-34, Mark 15:33-34, 37)

1. Describe to Jesus what you saw him endure and how you were affected by him being crucified on a Roman cross.

2. What do you want to say to Jesus after empathizing with him?

1. Describe to Jesus what you saw him endure and how you were affected by watching his dead body buried in a tomb.

Fifth Station: When Your Body Was Buried

The Jews asked Pilate to have their legs broken so the bodies would not remain on the crosses on the Sabbath. It was the day of preparation for the Passover, and that year the Passover fell on the Sabbath. The soldiers came and broke the legs of both the men crucified next to Jesus. When they came up to Jesus' cross, they could see that He was dead; so they did not break His legs. Instead, one soldier took his spear and pierced His abdomen, which brought a gush of blood and water.

Off in the distance, away from the crowds, stood some women who knew and had followed Jesus, including Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of the younger James, Joses, and Salome. These were women who used to care for Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem joined them.

Evening came. The crucifixion had taken place on preparation day, Friday, before the Jewish Sabbath began at sundown. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the ruling council who was also a believer anxiously waiting for the kingdom of God, went to Pilate and boldly asked for the body of Jesus.

Pilate could not believe Jesus was already dead, so he sent for the Centurion, who confirmed it. Then Pilate gave Joseph permission to take the body.

Joseph had the body wrapped in a linen burial cloth he had purchased and laid Him in a tomb that had been carved out of rock. Then he had a stone rolled over the opening to seal it. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were watching as the body was interred.

(John 19:30-31, Mark 15:40-47)

2. What do you want to say to Jesus after empathizing with him?

Final Prayer and Reflection

Take some time and consider everything you've witnessed your Friend, Jesus, go through. How do you feel? What emotions have been stirred in you? What has shifted or opened in your heart toward Jesus? Write down your observations.

Consider this final stanza from the beautiful hymn, "O Sacred Head Thou Wounded," and respond to Jesus in the space below.

What language shall I borrow
To thank thee, dearest Friend,
For this, thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
O make me thine forever;
And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
Outlive my love to thee.