

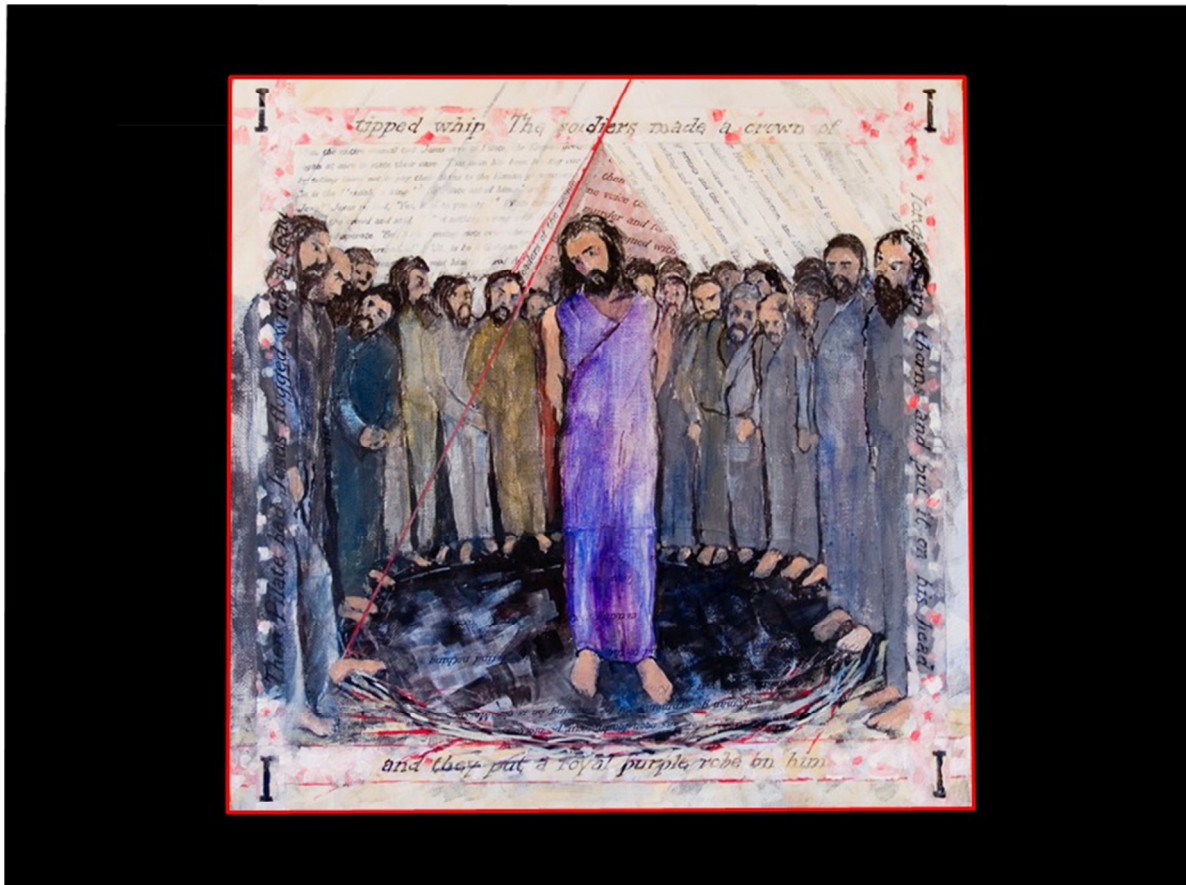
This series of paintings, stories and poems, was inspired by the work of Katerina Whitely, detailed in the book 'Walking the Way of Sorrows'

1. Jesus is Condemned to Death

John 19:1-2

19:1 Then Pilate had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip. 2 The soldiers made a crown of long, sharp thorns and put it on his head, and they put a royal purple robe on him.

Painting by Greg Footit



As seen by the arresting Soldier

Story, by Sharon Footit

In a job like ours, Roman soldiers dealing with prisoners, you learn a trick or two. One trick was that you could do almost anything, as long as you didn't look the prisoner in the eye. Most prisoners, their aggression towards us, well that helps us to stay focused. But this one was different. He came willingly, or at least it seemed that way.

Some had whispered that he was a King, a secret king of the Jews who would cause trouble for us Romans and who had been rejected by his own people. Certainly it was the leaders of his people who stood accusing him this day. I have seen people who wield power. They wear it to impress and to cause fear. But he exhibited none of this. If he was a king, he was certainly different to any I had met or served before. Why?

I stood looking around; Pilate in his chair of judgment, the accusers circling this

man. Pilate had such power, life and death stood in the balance, yet he was calm and seemed at peace. His accusers were angry, eyes glistening with hatred and seeming victory. Yet, as I looked around the circle, it seemed to me that we were judged not he, and it wasn't Pilate who was in the judgment seat at all, but some higher power present that day. Don't get me wrong, I am no Jew to believe in their God, but it felt momentous, this prisoner was not just one of the many, and a shiver went down my spine as Pilate finally condemned him to death. He didn't want to, I saw that. He spoke to the prisoner, took him a way for a moment or two, came back declaring that he could find nothing to condemn him to death for. His accusers would have none of it, and their anger at the prisoner boiled over and erupted before Pilate. He was as frightened of their power over him, to cause riot and mayhem, as they were of his power over them.

When the prisoners get angry, it makes things easy. As they push, we push back, all the harder. I figured he must be really furious to be treated so roughly. And that was my mistake. I turned, and he was looking full at me. His eyes stayed on me. It was as if he urged his love on me, and I couldn't stand it! I pushed him roughly, wanting him to show some anger or bitterness, but, though he stumbled for a moment he didn't fall, and he continued to look at me with that same look of love and compassion.

What is it about this prisoner? What? Suddenly I realized that neither Pilate, nor us soldiers doing Pilate's bidding, nor his accusers had any power over him. He didn't fear what man could do to him. It was as if the scales of judgment had been tipped, and we were the ones found wanting.

Poem by Greg Footit

I can't bear to look any longer.
I feel so ashamed.
The scales of Justice are tipped.
We place our weight upon his judgement
This is his hour to fulfil
But not he that is judged.

2. Jesus Takes Up His Cross

Luke 10:36-37 (excerpt from the Good Samaritan Parable) 36 "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbour to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. 37 The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."



As Seen by a woman passing by.

Story by Sharon Footit

The parade always passes my door, each year when they crucify the prisoners. I glanced out, not really wanting to take it all in, feeling compassion for whatever poor devil went by, whatever they had done. This time, my eyes went wide with shock and horror, my face ashen white. It was Jesus, cruel crown of thorns on his head causing blood to run down his face, his bruised and bloody body wracked with pain as he held that weight of the cross to his back. I clutched my baby to my breast and ran outside. "What has Jesus done to deserve this? The soldiers seemed unaware of who it was they were parading to his death. Did they know of his teaching that told us of God's love? I wanted to scream at them, but I was frightened for my own life, and for the baby I carried in my arms, so I just walked alongside him for a while, hoping he understood that I just wanted to walk with him, just be with him so that he knew that he wasn't alone in this crowd of bitterness, hatred and destruction. I couldn't walk in his shoes, but I could walk alongside.

As I walked, I just couldn't take it in. I hold life - this precious baby in my arms, but I shadow him and he holds death. I am close enough to hear his quiet whisper above the noise of the crowd - "Abba!" I remember his prayer to his father, the one he taught his followers. He called God in Heaven his "Abba". Did his father, his 'Abba' God care what was happening to him that day?

There were priests along the roadside, angry and bitter. As I passed one yelled. "You have no business here, next to a criminal!" I cringed, ready to slip away, and then something stiffened my resolve. "Doesn't the Lord ask us to have compassion for the stranger?"

Jesus told a story about showing compassion. It was the stranger, the outsider who cared for the man robbed on his way to Jericho—the religious people who taught God's law, they walked along on the other side of the road. I gave the priest a look that showed I was resolute, and he looked away and left me to walk. I thought of the story Jesus told, how the Samaritan stopped & cared for the man, even paying for his care. I wasn't able to stop Jesus pain, or bind up his wounds, nor could I get him to a place where he could find healing. I knew that this road was leading to his death. But Jesus was neighbour to me. All I could do is walk with him along the path, and hope that it was enough.

Poem by Greg Footit

You glance across your shoulder to see who approaches
Is it another beating, a blow to hurry you up?
The crowd stand silent, in need of rabble rousing couches
But it is just I Lord who approaches, seeking to fall in step.

Rejected, you walk, a man of sorrows, a stranger
Your life will be short and violent, if you be not Messiah,
But not alone you walk, not friendless in the way
Mercy given, mercy received, this is your finest day
No, I bring no blow to lay upon your back
You bear it for me till the day you give it back
Today I want to step with you, to walk a single mile
To show you friendship in the thing I do, to bring a little smile

3. Jesus Falls the First Time

John 21:24-25

24 This is that disciple who saw these events and recorded them here. And we all know that his account of these things is accurate. 25 And I suppose that if all the other things Jesus did were written down, the whole world could not contain the books.

As seen by John bar-Zebedee



Story by Sharon Footit

Words fail to describe the agony of the scene you ask me to describe.

I look back on our three years with him. I was ambitious and wanted him to succeed so that I could succeed with him. James and I had so much to learn about what it was to truly be a leader. We failed so often, but he never gave up on us.

That day is imprinted on my brain, especially that first fall to the ground. Burdened with the cross, more than mere heavy beams of wood, and tired from the events of the night- goodbyes, betrayal, trials, mocking & beating— and now this cruel parade through the streets of Jerusalem, he fell heavily to the ground as if he carried the weight of the world, the weight of our lives on his shoulders, as he carried those heavy beams of wood.

He fell, blood pouring down his head from the crown of thorns, and down his back and legs from the whipping with the 'cat o' nine tails the Romans used. I thought that he would die there on the road! He lay there, quiet, almost in prayer. I remembered Isaiah's prophecy about God's servant, how he grew up in the Lord's presence, and I remembered the many times Jesus slipped away to commune with his 'Abba Father' to be back in God's presence again.

People were jeering at him as he fell. I looked at his precious face, he looked shocking, nothing to attract any to comfort him. He was indeed despised and rejected. It was such a pitiful sight, that those of us who knew him and loved him, even us, we turned our back on him.

Then I remembered that it was our weakness he carried, our sorrows that weighed him down. I determined that I would look again into his bloodied and battered face, lying there on the ground before me. I would remember this day. I would never forget this public display of what a true leader of God looks like. It was the Lord's good plan to crush him and fill him with grief, and it was all for our sake, that people like James and I would truly know the meaning and cost of his success on our behalf.

He never offered a sound, even though the pain must have been unbearable. With a look up into the heavens, and a sidelong glance at me along the pathway, he gritted his teeth and rose up again, ready to take on the double burden of cross and our lives upon his shoulders.

Poem by Greg Footit

No word came from his lips
Not even a sound
He bore it all, the words that whipped
His face pressed hard against the ground

4. Jesus meets his afflicted Mother

Luke 2:33-35

33 Joseph and Mary were amazed at what was being said about Jesus. 34 Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, "This child will be rejected by many in Israel, and it will be their undoing. But he will be the greatest joy to many others. 35 Thus, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

As seen by Mary of Nazareth



Story by Sharon Footit

I wasn't going to watch, but somehow love compelled me, and then I saw him fall, and I couldn't stop myself from rushing to his side. Though soldiers tried to stop me, I whispered incoherently 'My Son, My Son', as I pushed to his side, and they let me through. I went to him, and touched his bruised and bloodied face with my hand.

Tears filled my eyes, for him or for myself, I still don't know.

My vision blurred, and I was once again in the Temple, and I saw again Old Simeon's face of wonder, and heard Anna's ecstatic joy as the words poured out from their aged throats —"I have seen the Saviour you have given to all people." I remembered again my face, filled with such excruciating joy as I held you close and protected in my arms.

But then Simeon blessed us, and concluded his prophecy with a word for me alone. "This child will be rejected by many in Israel, and it will be their undoing. But he will be the greatest joy to many others. Thus, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

I kept smiling at Simeon, but fear grabbed at my heart, fear that what I saw in my

minds eye might come true.

What I wanted to say was “Stop! This is my own darling child. Let me enjoy him. Stop filling me with foreboding.” My fears have come true, and indeed Simeon was right – a sword has pierced my very soul.

As I came back to myself, the vision before me returned. My son, broken and bloodied before me, and a sob escapes my lips. Wanting to comfort me Jesus reminded me that this was God’s plan from the beginning. Simeon’s prophecy, everything was known from the beginning, for this journey was the one that would bring God’s Salvation, overcoming the corruption of this world.

I remembered the angels at Jesus birth, and I knew that the peace that was promised by them could only come as a result of this lonely journey of rejection, betrayal, suffering, and finally – yes –death. I had known it all along, but didn’t want to face it. But now, as I looked with a mother’s love into his broken face, I understood, and for the first time in his life with me, I had peace, the peace that passes understanding.

Poem by Greg Footit

She hugs him close, as Jesus hugs his cross
Just tears she leaves, no words can carry this loss
A bitter heart, that it would come to this
Such hope, such love, salvation bought by this?

5. The Cross is Laid on Simon of Cyrene

Mark 15:21

21 A man named Simon, who was from Cyrene,* was coming in from the country just then, and they forced him to carry Jesus' cross.

As Told By Simon



Story by Sharon Footit

The noise was deafening, angry voices, sobbing voices, screaming ones. What had I struck? We followed the noise till I could see what was happening. I watched as the soldiers shoved the crowds back, saw the woman touch the face of the prisoner trying to rise, saw them push her back into the crowd. In the crowd there were mixed reactions, some angry and gleeful to see him suffer, but others who turned their faces away, as if to see him was to shame them.

I was propelled forward, almost as if I was being pushed, though no human hand touched me. I realized that I had come to the front of the crowd, it was almost as if the crowd had opened up to let me in. The soldiers raised their hands to push me away, but then they looked at the prisoner, and back at me, and the two next to me grabbed me so that I wouldn't get away. "You, you can carry his cross!" I was big, Cyrene produces big men, strong men, labouring men. I was big, black and strong—and they wanted me to carry his cross.

I wanted to shout out 'No, I won't do it!', but two things compelled me; the soldiers held me firm, but then I looked at the man on the ground. He looked at me with compassion and understanding. What had he done to deserve this, I wondered?

I had heard him teach, I had seen him from time to time in discussion and argument, even once with compassion, as he stopped the stoning of a woman caught in adultery. He spoke of God's love and acceptance.

So, I bent and lifted the cross on my back, and he reached his bleeding hand and closed his fingers on my arm in gratitude. I remembered being in the crowd when Jesus spoke of the final judgment and he concluded –“I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!”
This was not a brother or sister in need, this was Christ Himself!

My life was changed that day, and I knew that I was propelled to that place at that time by the hand of God. Whenever I give food or drink to those I see around me who are hungry or thirsty, whenever I invite a stranger home for a meal and a bed, whenever I give clothes to those in desperate need or visit those who are imprisoned, I remember the privilege I had to first of all show God's love to Jesus on the road to Golgotha, and I thank God for his mercy & grace.

Poem by Greg Footit

Bear this for me, as I bear it for thee
He bears it awkwardly, it is not his cross.
But he bears it well, this stranger does not flee
For this is privilege, and neighbourly, to thee

A passer by, a meeting of chance?
Yet you have entered salvation's story
Your part to play in this great dance
His story, your story, my story too, Glory!

6. A Woman Wipes the Face of Jesus

Isaiah 53:2b-3

There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. 3 He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised, and we did not care.

As told by the woman with the issue of blood.



Story by Sharon Footit

I loved the view from this window, the streetscape of busy travellers, and the city humming with activity. It was here that I saw him that fateful day, above the narrow climbing path. Imagine having to climb it with a tree on your back. From the distance, I saw the procession stop, and the Romans force another man to carry it. I looked at the prisoner, seeing beyond the blood and bruise that made him almost unrecognizable, but then I knew, and my heart skipped a beat. It was the same man who had brought the crowds together to hear him speak of God, and do all manner of miracles.

I was in the crowd that day, the day when Jairus begged Jesus to heal his little girl. I was that woman who imagined I could get away with surreptitiously touching the hem of his garment. I was the one he compassionately healed, the one who was given back life after twelve years of misery and alienation!

On this day, there were crowds, but not with praise and adoration on their lips. I heard the roar and ugly noise from afar. There was a crowd ahead and many more trailed behind, jeering and spitting upon him.

I ran down the stairs as I was. I needed to be near him, to offer him what comfort I could. I emerged from the doorway and it was at that moment he was passing me by. I saw his face, torn, bleeding and sad beyond human understanding. Dust and sweat mingled on his brow, together with dried blood. I remembered the Scriptures from Isaiah about the servant of the Lord, and I knew that he was the one, and that his suffering was for our sake. He was indeed wounded and bruised, oppressed and afflicted, and he took it all so silently. I realized at that moment that it was for our transgressions, or iniquities.

There was no moment to stop, to think before doing it. I reached up with the cloth I still held in my hand, forgotten in the rush down the stairs. I reached out, just like I did before, not to touch the hem of his garment, but to wipe the sweat and blood from his face, and to touch him with the gentle touch of love and compassion, born of gratitude for all he had done for me.

Poem by Greg Footit

Remembered Grace

A secret healing, an issue of blood

You came up from behind, the hem of his garment

A touch of faith, need met in that moment

You wipe his face, you reach out now

A little kindness in a crowd so chilled

And he walks on, now his face is set

But your small kindness he remembers yet.

7. Jesus Falls the Second Time

John 17:11b-12a

Holy Father, keep them and care for them—all those you have given me—so that they will be united just as we are. 12 During my time here, I have kept them safe.* I guarded them so that not one was lost, except the one headed for destruction, as the Scriptures foretold.

As seen by James bar-Zebedee—



Story by Sharon Footit

When he fell that second time, I doubted that he would ever rise again. Where the crowds were originally a mixed bag of sympathizers, but when he fell again, it was as if evil entered into the hearts of all who gathered along the road. I saw neighbours and so-called friends in the front line, their feet raised up to stomp and kick him. They spoke unspeakable blasphemy as they spat and stomped.

"You weakling, you don't even have to carry your cross, and still you fall. You useless scrap of humanity, you promised so much and in the end, you have given us so little. The priests were right! We should never have put our hope in you!" And then they let their feet make contact with his head and face, along his back, especially kicking the places where the skin was already scourged and blood poured out. They wanted to hurt him! I couldn't understand why.

I understood the priests and the teachers of the law. He was a different view of God, and they didn't like it. But these were people I knew. These were ordinary people, like you and me, and they did unspeakable things, spurred on by the jeering and yelling, spurred on to uncharacteristic violence and this to one who had never raised his hand or foot in violence or his voice in anger.

I could not bear to watch the scene before me, it made me sick to my stomach, but just as I turned away, I looked around into the crowd, and I saw more of his disciples, more of us looking on, grieving and fearful.

I remembered the prayer he prayed for us - was it only last night? He prayed, knowing that the hour had come for him to complete the work given for him to do. He knew it was time for him to be lifted up, so that people could be drawn up with him, and given the hope of eternity with God. He prayed for our safety. He had protected us for so long, and now he was not going to be with us, and he asked that we would be one, just as he was one with his 'Abba Father'.

As I looked around, I knew that we needed to come together, to be one, just as he had prayed. I knew that in God's plans and timing all this was necessary. And so I began the task of bringing us together as one, ready to do his will.

Poem by Greg Footit

Whose foot was it that pushed through the legs?
To kick and nudge flesh insensible
Yours, mine, we will never really know
On with the show; it demands— reprehensible

Is he dead? What a weak one.
He bears not his cross, what weighs him down?
It is you brother, mother, sister or son
He bears us all, we drive him down.

These feet that Jesus washed
Now kick and prod, ugly beyond all sight
Our feet, beneath them he lay
That we might walk in paradise.

8. Jesus Meets with the Women of Jerusalem

Luke 23:28-29

But Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the days are coming when they will say, 'Fortunate indeed are the women who are childless, the wombs that have not borne a child and the breasts that have never nursed.'

As seen by Joanna—



Story by Sharon Footit

A loud wail rose and reached everyone's ears. How many of us were there? The crowd of women was huge, family, friends, women Jesus had ministered to along the way. Three years of loving compassion brought forward a multitude, all women and children, together for strength and comfort.

The procession was moving out of the city, out to 'skull rock' where the crucifixion would take place. There was a space where the road turned, and even the big man who carried his cross needed to take a breath. In that moment we surged forward in such misery that even the Soldiers let us have a few last words with him. He turned to us and we saw the tears in his eyes, tears for us. He looked at the dirty trail of our tears down our faces and urged us not to weep for him, but for ourselves and our children, for there will be hardship ahead, and days coming when the suffering of this city will be so great that we will wish that we had never had the blessing of children, or known what it is like to nurse an infant at the breast. One of the woman cried out in horror, "Let the mountains fall on us to cover us!", for we were deemed blessed to have children.

It seems to me by the crush I felt in my chest that they had already done so. As

the big man took the weight of the cross again, the procession moved on. We looked at one another, and unspoken we all determined that we would follow him until the end. It seemed we walked as one, all agreed in this endeavour, we who had followed him during those exhilarating months of his doing good wherever he went. We would stay with him to the end, no matter what happened to us.

And as we trudged along behind the sad procession, a strange calm came over me. I remembered his warning regarding being his followers "If you lose your life for my sake you will find it." We did not know what the future held, except that Jesus had warned us of horrors unimaginable that awaited us in the future. None-the-less, we knew that all our hope lay in putting our trust in him, and our lives in his hands.

And so we did not, indeed, we could not abandon him.

Poem by Greg Footit

Some women brought their children to him
That he might bless them, just one more time,
Now soldiers, not disciples, drive them back
But still he reaches out that we might be healed.

You weep, I weep, this terrible thing,
But not for me, not for me.
This walk I walk has salvations' ring
I pray, I pray, that it go easy with thee

Pregnant you stand, as all time is pregnant
The hour approaches, all possibility stands still.
Even now he reaches out to the children
Even now, he walks toward the hill.

9. Jesus Falls the Third time

John 13:26b-27

And when he had dipped it, he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. 27 As soon as Judas had eaten the bread, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus told him, "Hurry. Do it now."

Luke 22:47-48

47 But even as he said this, a mob approached, led by Judas, one of his twelve disciples. Judas walked over to Jesus and greeted him with a kiss. 48 But Jesus said, "Judas, how can you betray me, the Son of Man, with a kiss?"



As Seen By Judas Iscariot—

What was it that drove me to this? Was it vainglory? Was it arrogant assumption that I knew it all, could control it all? I thought I was possessed by God who gave me insight! How could I have been so wrong?

All I wanted for him was to succeed! Was that such a bad thing? He had all the makings of a great leader, and all of us believed he was the Messiah.

But then he started talking about his kingdom being not of this world, and saving us, not as we wanted and needed, from the oppression of the Romans in our midst, but from our inner life of sin and alienation from God. What sort of Messiah was that I ask you?

Indeed, I did believe that he was God's chosen one, and I still believed that when I went to the priests and offered to betray him. I didn't want the money, of course I didn't! All I wanted was for him to rise up. He was wrong about his role, and I

was right –that was all there was to it, and if I had to push his hand, well, that was what followers were for wasn't it? I watch the procession, seeing the hated Romans push him uphill to his death, and I almost despair. But then he falls and I am standing close by, and a grasp at the chance to urge him on, this one last opportunity for him to see it my way.

I fall down beside him, my face close enough to feel his warm breath on my cheeks. "Jesus," I whisper, "it's not too late. I know you are Messiah, and you can call down ten thousand angels to save you, and set you up as king. Do it!! Be our Saviour!! This world needs you to see it my way, to do it my way, to be the Messiah we all expected! Can't you see?"

As he opens his eyes, I see the same grief and compassion he had when we shared the meal the night before. I quake as a whispered doubt comes in my mind. I know he is Messiah, and what if his way, was after all the way God planned? What if I am wrong?

I cringe and hide, from the others or from myself, I do not know. I have a premonition of impending disaster. I know now – uncanny how I couldn't see it before – that he was right and I was wrong. As I spent time thinking of war and dreaming of victory for us Jews, he spent time in ever deepening communion with his "Abba Father".

What was it that drove me to this? Not God, but unadulterated evil, I know that now. There is nothing left for me to live for. I have betrayed the chosen one of God, betrayed him with a kiss, and he goes to his death because of me, and I cannot live with the shame.

Poem by Greg Footit

Come on Jesus—get up, get up
This thing you do, is it all God's plan?
Was I wrong? Were you right?
Is God's servant truly meant to suffer - not show his might?
I thought to help reveal your glory
Now despair and disgrace forever my story

10. Jesus is stripped of His Garments

John 19:23-24

23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes among the four of them. They all so took his robe, but it was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. 24 So they said, "Let's not tear it but throw dice* to see who gets it." This fulfilled the Scripture that says, "They divided my clothes among themselves and threw dice for my robe."

As told by the gambling soldier—



Story by Sharon Footit

Gambling was a way of life for all Roman soldiers. Our pay was mere subsistence, and we needed some way for the extras of life. Gambling for the clothes off the back of our condemned criminals was one of many ways we made up the extra we needed to live. Today, two of these poor sods are experienced criminals, and they give as well as they take. If looks could kill, we would be the ones being fitted for these crosses, not them. They have been cursing us from the hour we tied them up. They don't have much, but we taunt them as we gamble for what they have – not much – but no longer theirs.

This third one has me beat. Quiet, dignified, he has said not one mean word to us. Stripping him of his clothes was easy. We took it all, even his bloodied cloak. The robe was part of the mocking, but it was good quality, rich purple and it was made in one woven piece, and we didn't want to tear it, so we gambled to see which of us would get it.

As I looked at him, I shivered. The sky had darkened, unnatural, like night, and with the sun gone, darkness and cold—great bedfellows. It was an omen, or what I was not sure.

I looked again at his cloak, and then at his nakedness, as he awaited the next part

of his humiliation. It was terrifying to realize that though I was fully dressed in Roman army uniform and he was naked –as he came into this life, so he was leaving it- I was the one who felt strangely humiliated and laid bare on that hill, while he had an innate dignity that had nothing to do with what he was wearing.

I never wore that cloak, even though I won it fair and square.

Poem by Greg Footit

Not even a borrowed cloak now hides your nakedness
Exposed now, as when you came into the world
Stripped of all dignity, just you, in the flesh
No place to hide, no good will, just a circle of feet.

You have walked this earth, and gave it meaning
Now we stand around you, your humanity demeaning.
No gifts we bear, no honour, no good will
A job has to be done, power served to the king.

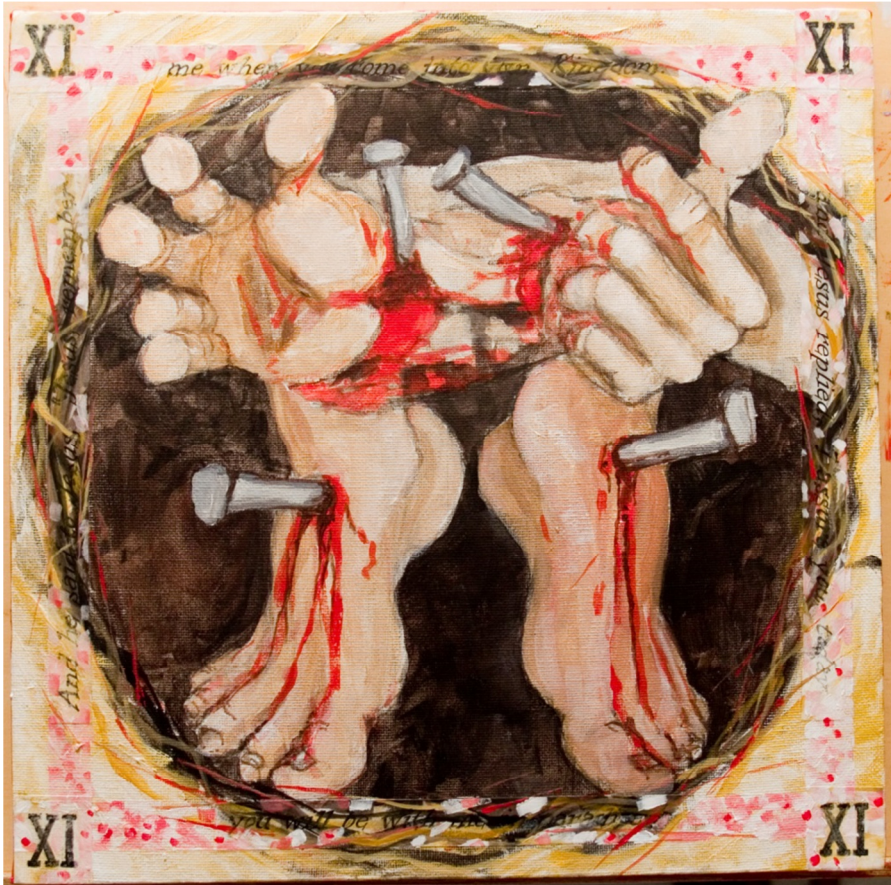
The dice rolled for me, this was my lucky day
I hold your cloak, I won it fair and square
But deeper things are here, and higher motive too
I hold your cloak, you hold my heart, you won it with a dare.

11. Jesus is Nailed to the Cross

Isaiah 6:10

10 Harden the hearts of these people. Close their ears, and shut their eyes. That way, they will not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn to me for healing.”

As seen by the soldier on duty—



Story by Sharon Footit

My job is routine. I make it so, by the rules I live by. The prisoners are not human. Doing what is required is all that is important, so they can't be human. And, just to be sure, I never, never look them in the face. I never see their horror or their agony, their fear or their hatred.

I was the one on duty during the Jewish Passover, when Jesus was condemned to death. Can't say I ever heard his teaching, but whatever he did, he got his own people pretty riled up about it. It was they who brought the charges against him, and it was they who demanded Pilate order the death penalty.

He made it up the path to 'Skull Hill', he looked so badly battered, I was almost surprised – after all I had heard he had fallen a number of times – but then he did have that big black guy carry his cross – without him, I don't think we would have been needed to nail him onto these hunks of wood.

I lifted the hammer to bring it down on the wrists. The trick you see is to just look at the places where you need to hammer, wrists and feet. Don't look at the face, and definitely not into the eyes – just the feet and the hands. And so I drove the

hammer down onto the huge nail, puncturing his wrist and securing him to the wooden horizontal bar of the cross. He didn't offer a sound, and laid still as I grabbed hold of the other wrist and repeated the exercise. His silence disturbed me. It had never happened like this before. But I knew what I had to do, so I resisted the need to look into his face, and I kept my head down at the task at hand. I had moved now to his feet. Again and again the hammer came down, splintering bone and fixing his feet securely to the upright bar of the cross.

I had done my job, and now I took the risk of looking at his face. As my fellow soldiers heaved the cross into its hole, with him upon it, I foolishly looked up, thinking that the pain would stop any recognition in him. But he glanced at me, and the other soldiers around me and then he raised his face to the heavens and said "Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing."

I pretended I hadn't heard, because deep inside I was shaking. Now I sit here in the dark, seeing the outline of the cross against the night sky, and in the darkness I weep silently, for myself or for him, I do not know.

Poem by Greg Footit

There are his hands, grasping in rictus
There is no beauty here, no soft lines -
All because - God picked us

These are the nails
I own each and every one
It is my hand that drives them
My cup that captures the blood.

Tap, tap, thud thud
Is that hammer or heart beat?
I hold my breath—my breath
This for me, sweet Jesus, for me.

12. Jesus Dies on the Cross

Mark 15:37-39

37 Then Jesus uttered another loud cry and breathed his last. 38 And the curtain in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed, "Truly, this was the Son of God!"

As seen by the Centurion—



Story by Sharon Footit

Something strange was happening, but we were soldiers and we did what we were told. This prisoner was different, and the circumstances were different. Who was this Jesus anyway? And what did it matter to me?

I had spent time in Galilee, and now, as I looked at the prisoner, recollection stirred within me. You see, I have a slave, he has been with me forever, and he was sick. I had heard of this local healer, and I was desperate, so I sent word to him—this Jesus. I had been impressed by the reports about him, and when my slave was so near death, I went to this Jewish Rabbi/ healer, and asked for his help. Well, the slave was healed, and this Jesus didn't need to even come and touch him.

When I was recalled to Jerusalem, I left all that behind me, thankful but focussed on the work at hand. But Jesus confronted me now, the very same man, and a sense of foreboding filled my heart. What if the God's are with this Jesus? Pilate seemed uncomfortable with the charges and it was obvious that he didn't want to condemn him.

Even he can see that he does not deserve such a punishment. None-the-less, early

in the morning he does condemn him, washing his hands as he does so, as gesture to try and allow the blame to fall on others.

There were moments in that walk that I will never forget, the woman who walked alongside him, the one who wiped his brow, the black man who was dragooned to carry his cross, the large group of women he spoke to along the way- they were the good memories. But there was also the violence by the crowds, their jeering and kicking him as he fell - that sort of hatred I wish I could forget. Throughout it all, he had a presence, and I understood my friend from Galilee. I felt sad that this man was going to die at our hand.

Something fell into place when Jesus drew his last breath. A great cry arose from deep within him, his last breath escaping – “It is finished!”

For the past three hours an unnatural darkness had fallen upon Skull Hill, and the sun had seemed to disappear. We felt abandoned by the universe, and it seemed that the cosmos echoed this momentous time. Who was he? – I heard myself say aloud. As I faced him, seeing how he died, and knowing the way he had lived, I could only exclaim “Truly, this was the Son of God!”

Poem by Greg Footit

“It is finished, it is finished!” such sweet words
Better than ‘such is life’ that has no meaning
You gave your all for a hope, God’s dreaming
All creation weeps, hear the sound of the keening.

There were witnesses of course,
Every execution has them.
To watch every detail, some to cheer, some to curse, others cry
In satisfaction or sadness, they watch him die

13. The Body of Jesus is placed in the Arms of His Mother

John 19:38:

38 Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take Jesus' body down. When Pilate gave him permission, he came and took the body away.

As spoken by Joseph of Arimathea –



Story by Sharon Footit

I cannot be secret any longer. I must declare my loyalty, and do it publicly. I have spent too many months watching him, listening to his words, and seeing his miracles, all in secret admiration and belief. Now I must declare myself his. What stopped me for so long? I was a member of the Sanhedrin, and I knew how many of my fellow council members were bitter in their dislike and anger. It should not have stopped me, but the fear of losing face was too great. I remained silent when I should have spoken out. Now I live with my own shame. Pilate gives his permission, strange as the request must seem to him, a foreigner unused to our laws, and I move back to the place of the skull to take his body away and wrap it in graveclothes for burial.

It is dark all around, though still before official sundown, and the beginning of the Sabbath. Most of the spectators have gone home, their gory spectator sport now over and finished with. There are still women at the foot of his cross, or at least as close as they are allowed to get. They weep and grieve, for him or for themselves, I do not know.

As my servant and I give the guard our authority to take down his body, a number of the women look up, some young, others older. An older woman stood by, her face streaked with tears, sad and grief-stricken. With help the cross was upended

from the hole, and laid once again on the ground. Nails driven in such a short time before are now ripped out again, as Jesus dead body is released from its cursed tree.

Before I could stop her, and I am not sure I would have wanted to, the woman rushed forward and gathered his vacant and staring face into her loving arms. And in that action, I knew her for his mother. She rocks back and forth, holding him close to her breast, as one would to suckle a newborn babe. Even as the tears roll down her face and touch gently upon his, she reaches down and touches his face one last time. Despite this day, I now sit in wonder at what tomorrow might hold.

Poem by Greg Footit

Such hope is laid here, so much dreaming
From your flutter in my womb, I have loved you, yes.
Dreaming, and yes, scheming, the angels promised so much

Yet Simeon - a warning
Now to this we are brought, confused, heart breaking,
Will love conquer and overcome? I love you still
Thy will be done!

John 19:39-42

39 Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night, also came, bringing about seventy-five pounds* of embalming ointment made from myrrh and aloes. 40 Together they wrapped Jesus' body in a long linen cloth with the spices, as is the Jewish custom of burial. 41 The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, never used before. 42 And so, because it was the day of preparation before the Passover and since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

As spoken by Nicodemus—



Story by Sharon Footit

If Joseph can show courage, I should do the same. I was the one who spent the most interesting night of my life listening to the young rabbi. I went in secret, and kept my secret admiration from all my friends in the Sanhedrin, even from his followers. I couldn't afford to let anyone know how much his teaching disturbed and fascinated me.

And now, here I am, public in my following of him, grieving together with Joseph his other secret disciple. A servant of Joseph's came a few hours ago to tell me that a tomb was prepared for the body of Jesus. Would I be willing to help with the burial?

The time has come, we must hurry in order not to violate the Sabbath.

Quietly now, with no tears, Jesus mother touches one last time the face of her beloved son, and Joseph and I, assisted by our servants, lift the lifeless body and carry it across the garden to the tomb. The other women take hold of Mary and lead

her away, supporting and encouraging one another, as they leave this place of suffering and death. I have brought spices and herbs. We have little time, before the Sabbath begins. None-the-less he must be buried properly and with dignity.

We enter the tomb, only Joseph and I. The servants stand respectfully outside. There is a large slab of stone in the centre of the cave, and on it we lay the body and I sprinkle profuse spices on it. Then the two of us wind the long sheet around and around his body until everything is covered in white.

His pierced brow has stopped bleeding, but I can still see the marks of the thorns. Tenderly, I lift the head and Joseph winds a separate long white band around it.

We exit walking backwards, as if in the presence of a king. The stone on the side of the cave is round and flat and looks extremely heavy. The four of us put our weight and strength to it, and slowly, with great difficulty, we seal the tomb. As we turn around two things happen. Through the bushes we see some of the women who have come to see where his body has been taken. They move to speak, but at that moment, some soldiers come up, ordered to keep watch so that no-one disturb or steal the body.

The women in fright turn away. The soldiers set up their guard stations, and we go home to celebrate the Sabbath. What will the new day bring? What has happened to all the hopes of those who love him, and where is the new life he promised?

Poem by Greg Footit

In the clay I lay darkly
All hope is now gone,
Gone is the sunshine, flowers and warmth
Gone are the children, gone out to play
This is my darkness
God, O God, in you I trust
Bring forth your power
Raise up this dust

15. Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed!

Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel* reigns! The watchmen shout and sing with **joy**, for before their very eyes they see the LORD bringing his people home to Jerusalem.* Let the ruins of Jerusalem break into joyful song, for the LORD has comforted his people. He has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will demonstrate his holy power before the eyes of all the nations. The ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

As Spoken by Thomas—



Story by Sharon Footit

I wasn't there when Jesus appeared to all the other disciples behind the locked doors. I heard about it of course, and I saw the difference in my friends. I realized that I had missed out on something, but I just couldn't get my head around the idea that Jesus was alive again. I had watched from a distance, but I knew without a doubt, he was dead! I guess I resented their enthusiasm. I declared that I wouldn't believe that he was alive unless I saw him myself, and put my fingers into the nail wounds and wound in his side. What a gracious Saviour he was! Even in the face of my arrogant words of disbelief, he met my need to see him myself, his wounds and his risen body. I fell at his feet, recognizing him for who he was Lord and God. He was disappointed, I think, that I needed physical proof, and compared my faith to those who would believe without the physical evidence of wounds and risen body.

And then I knew what I was being called to do. I was to travel to far off places and tell people what I had seen and what I knew of Jesus, Son of God. I remembered a passage from Isaiah about the

'feet that bring good news' and this was good news indeed. I walked through valleys, and over mountain ranges, through fields of flowers; everlastings that reminded me of the everlasting life and hope promised and begun in the new life given.

My wanderings took me far and wide, even to the shores of India, and beyond, always heading east where many accepted my words, my testimony of the one who had defeated death, and given us this hope of life everlasting. From doubt and blindness, to faith and seeing, to awe and joy and finally commissioning and sending, 'the ends of the earth have indeed seen the salvation of our God'.

Poem by Greg Footit

How can I describe this walk I walk?
It began with a question, ended with a song.
Through fields of flowers now I run, and run,
To tell many others, of the rising of the Son.
He lives, he lives, he has rescued me
Saved me from doubt, set me free, set me free.
To me he turned, amongst others to greet,
Take up your cross he said, now you are my feet.