

FARMERS' AND RANCHERS' WAY OF THE CROSS

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First Station: Jesus is condemned to death

The farmer's and rancher's way of life is condemned to death. It does not rain; blowing topsoil stains the sky brown, and grasshoppers cover crops like a blanket. With many natural destructive factors beyond their control, farmers struggle to maintain the land and most need to supplement their meagre income with jobs off the farm.

We give thanks for all who persevere on the farm in the face of death.

Lord, you were condemned to death, and yet you did not stray from the path you had chosen. Grant courage to our farmers who look death in the face with every natural disaster that limits or destroys hope of harvest. Help us to offer our support generously.

Second Station: Jesus takes up the cross

For many the rural way of life has become a cross. Making a living on the farm is becoming a burden fewer and fewer farmers are willing or able to bear. And still, there are those who shoulder the load because they are wedded to the land and cannot leave. Willingly they accept the cross of uncertainty and hardship.

We give thanks for all who love the land and who would rather take up the cross of a hard life than leave.

Lord, you took up the cross and you did so out of love. Help all those who carry the cross of farming in these difficult times. May their love for the land and their labour transform their cross into new life.

Third Station: Jesus falls the first time

Wheat prices drop, grain terminal workers are on strike, the Wheat Board limits the amount of grain individual farmers are permitted to sell. Fertilizer, pesticide and fuel prices rise and farmers are denied even the little income they might usually expect to gain from their work. Ranchers spend countless hours of hard labour in the freezing cold during calving time, yet the market price does not even come close to reflecting the labour that has been invested. Many fall under the burden, wondering whether they will ever be able to rise from under their crushing debt.

We give thanks for those who speak out and fight for a more fair distribution of moneys in the chain from farmer and rancher to consumer.

Lord, you fell and rose to continue on your difficult journey. Give those whose goals revolve around large profit margins the wisdom and the heart to see value in things other than wealth and material goods. Grant them the openness and courage to speak out against injustices that deny others fair payments for their labour and products.

Fourth station: Jesus meets his mother

Mothers often watch helplessly as their children struggle to make a living from the land, a living that once provided a good life for them when these same children were little. With concern they watch and wonder whether they are doing everything they can to help their children.

We give thanks for all mothers who want a better and more secure life for their grown children, but who nevertheless support their children's choice to farm.

Lord, you met your mother on your most difficult journey and saw the deep pain she carried because of her love for you. Ease the pain of mothers and grant them courage and strength so they may be the loving support farmers and ranchers need.

Fifth Station: Simon helps Jesus

As times get tougher, there are always people who will reach out in support - rural communities, neighbours, friends and strangers alike who offer a kind word, a generous hand with the harvest, a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on.

We give thanks for all who help farmers and ranchers in obvious and not so obvious ways to carry their burden.

Lord, you accepted the help of Simon in carrying your cross. Help farmers and ranchers to accept the kindnesses offered them without feeling that they have somehow failed.

Sixth Station: Veronica wipes Jesus' face

Wives go to work full-time to help maintain the farm, while at the same time shouldering the regular work of a farmwife - feeding crews, helping in the harvest, with the livestock, running errands, keeping books and caring for husband, children and the home.

We give thanks for all women who wholeheartedly labour to keep the farm viable.

Lord, you found some relief as Veronica reached out to you in compassion. Be with farmwives and grant them courage to offer the needed comfort and the insight to know what is needed without burning out themselves.

Seventh Station: Jesus fall a second time

The Canadian cattle industry is devastated by “Mad Cow” disease; the borders are closed to all exports, whole herds are slaughtered and there is no resolution in sight. That’s another blow that drives many farmers and ranchers to the verge of despair.

We give thanks for all who keep farming and ranching despite repeated set-backs.

Lord, you rose a second time under your load. Grant farmers and ranchers the faith and hope to carry on even though the future may look bleak.

Eighth Station: Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

Farmers and ranchers who themselves struggle to stay on the farm, give their time, their energy, their machinery to help another farmer or rancher without a second thought. In their own difficulties they feel the pain others face.

We give thanks for all who struggle with their own difficulties but who, nevertheless, have the heart to reach out to others even less fortunate than they are.

Lord, the women wept for you, but you showed concern for them. Grant farmers and ranchers your heart of flesh, so that they may show compassion for others in spite of their own struggles.

Ninth Station: Jesus falls a third time

Crops that have miraculously survived despite lack of moisture and an infestation of grasshoppers are devastated by hail, and another growing year ends with little or no harvest. Drought has turned pastures into a wasteland. Animals are unable to forage for food and ranchers, without money to buy feed, need to sell their stock at a loss .

We give thanks for those who can see the loss and devastation and still look into the future with hope to say, “Next year will be better.”

Lord, you fell a third time and again you got up to continue your painful journey. Help farmers and ranchers to keep their difficulties in perspective and not to despair at another setback.

Tenth Station: Jesus is stripped of his garments

After several years of drought and various infestations of pests, there is no money left, not even for necessities. Essential repairs to machinery and farmhouse must remain undone. Even trips to the Food Bank become a necessity.

We give thanks for all who can reach out to others without stripping them of their dignity as human beings and children of God.

Lord, you were stripped of your garments but not of your dignity. Please help us to respect the dignity of others, regardless of the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the cross

A bank forecloses on a farm, unfeeling of the human element, and another farm family, left destitute, wonders what the future will bring, as they face the death of their chosen way of life.

We give thanks for those who know how to listen and how to support those grieving the loss of their farm home.

Lord, you were nailed to the cross, yet you forgave those who condemned you. Help all those forced to leave the farm to find it in themselves to forgive and to avoid hatred and bitterness.

Twelfth Station: Jesus dies on the cross

Everything the farm family has worked for, often for generations, starting with a homestead, is put on the auction block and sold to the highest bidder. Livestock, machinery, treasured family heirlooms, the necessary and the precious are dispersed by people whose hearts are not entwined in every single item.

We give thanks for all who stand by farm families in their greatest hour of darkness, even though they know that they, too, may face the same fate.

Lord, you courageously faced death and set us free. Help all those who have lost courage to find hope in your resurrection and in the new life you bring.

Thirteenth Station: Jesus is taken down from the cross

Precious memories are left behind as moving day arrives. Few possessions remain to be taken. The farm or ranch is no longer theirs. What will happen next? Feelings of confusion, of hurt, of somehow having failed, overwhelm and bring tears.

We give thanks for all who are able to help others see a light of hope in the darkness.

Lord, you were taken down from the cross by people who loved you. Through people who love and care enough to stand by in time of pain and sorrow, bring support to those who lose their farm or ranch.

Fourteenth Station: Jesus is laid in the tomb

Another abandoned farmhouse is added to a land where there are already too many decaying and tumble-down farmhouses. A farmyard empty of machinery, a house empty of life are eerie reminders of a way of life that is getting ever harder to sustain.

We give thanks for all who sacrifice and struggle to put food on our tables.

Lord, when you were laid in the tomb, that seemed to be the end. Be with those who seem to have reached the end. Grant them courage and hope and the willingness to trust in you, the God of surprises.

Fifteenth Station: Jesus rises from the dead

The tomb cannot hold Jesus and he becomes the resurrection and the life for all ages to come. Jesus walks to Emmaus with two disciples who are unaware of his identity until he breaks bread and opens their eyes. Mary Magdalene does not recognize Jesus until he calls her name, then, joyfully, she becomes one of the first to proclaim the risen Christ.

The presence of Jesus, of resurrection and life, in the farming industry may not be obvious. Do we recognize Jesus when he accompanies us? Who are the people who proclaim Jesus after being called by name? Is Jesus present in the farmers from the East who send hay? Is the risen Christ proclaimed by those who organize farm-aid concerts, and who speak out against injustices in the farming and ranching industry? Where do I see the presence of new life? How am I able to be resurrection and life for others?

Lord, you rose from the dead to bring us new life. You sent us your Holy Spirit to be our advocate. Help us not to focus only on our loss and hardship, but rather, allow us to feel the actions of the Holy Spirit even in these difficult times. Grant us hope and grace us with the trust to believe that the Easter sunrise will come.