

## Nailed to the Cross - Station #6

John 19:23–25 (NRSV) —

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. 24 So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” 25 And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

*This morning Natalie and I are discussing stations 5 and 6<sup>th</sup> of the cross. We hope you have found this series meaningful and taken time to visit the first 4 stations.*

*Natalie, as I read the crucifixion stories, I am struck by how violent and humiliating crucifixion was for its victims. As you think about crucifixion, what do think was the most humiliating aspect of the crucifixion of Jesus?*

*How did Jewish men dress in 1<sup>st</sup> Palestine?*

*Are there any other similar examples of this humiliation in the history of the Christian community?*

*Natalie, here is the million dollar question? Why is this humiliation aspect significant to us? Does it have anything to say to us?*

*Dwight, it’s your turn to talk and for me to grill you. The sixth station is Nailed to the cross. Do you know anything about nails?*

*Did you learn anything about this station when you were preparing for today?*

*Why the nails?*

**Introduction.** The Sixth Station of the Cross is “Jesus is nailed to the Cross.”

As with many of you, I have a wide assortment of nails for home and my woodworking projects. I even have tools beyond a hammer to put nails into place. Recently I had a home project and I purchased a pneumatic nail gun to nail some vinyl siding to a wall. I love pneumatic nail guns.

You know, nails are intended to attach and to secure objects in a place. We nail pieces of wood together, use nails to hang pictures, nails to secure sheetrock to a wall, etc. Nails are not intended to be used to secure a person to a cross.

Thinking about Jesus being nailed to the cross heightens the sense of humiliation he had experienced when he was stripped. It would have definitely heightened the pain. (While I have never been pierced by a nail but I have hit my thumb with a hammer and know the intense pain it brings and the words that form in my mouth.) Having nails pounded into one’s hands and feet would have to produce excruciating pain. Station six is a place of greater humiliation and pain.

### **The Surprise.**

My preparation during this series has brought to me some surprises in scripture. Some of the things I always thought were in the scripture narratives are either different or non-existent. This is true of the nails. In most portrayals of the Jesus’ crucifixion we see the nails (spikes) used and hear the hammer driving them into place. The reverberation of the hammer striking the nails causes most of our souls to shake.

Did you know that none of the gospel writers in giving the narrative of Jesus’ crucifixion speak of Jesus “being nailed to the cross?” A few translations take liberty and interpret the word of Crucifixion as “nailed to the cross.” But the words, “nail” or “nailing” are not found in those sections of scripture in the original language. The first and only place we find mention of the nails is a story in John following the resurrection. Thomas was not with the disciples when had seen Jesus.

Listen to part of the story: *So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe”* (20:25). Thomas wanted to see the wounds left by the nails.

Yet despite this being seen only in one story in scripture, we typically make a big deal about the nails. We understand Jesus was attached to the cross with nails.

### **How Romans Carried out Crucifixion.**

Many through the years have been curious about how Romans carried out crucifixion, particularly how they would have executed Jesus. Unfortunately, no document has survived that gives the details of the how. Some have speculated based on pieces of evidence.

Many believe the Roman cross of first century Jerusalem did not have the typical top vertical section. They maintain the crosses were a T. The vertical post would be set in place with the horizontal piece attached.

How Jesus was attached to the cross is debated by them. Some evidence exists the arms were wrapped around the horizontal beam and secured with ropes. According to the biblical statement in John 20, nails were used in some fashion. Maybe if Jesus arms were wrapped they were attached on the back of the cross. Some have argued the nails would not have been used on the palms because the skin and muscles of the hands would have been too weak to support his weight. They argue the nails penetrated his wrists. Since there is no Greek word used for wrist, they may be right.

It is highly likely Jesus feet were nailed to the cross. We commonly think a single nail would have penetrated the top of both feet nailed to the front of the cross. But there is evidence of the feet a crucified person being nailed to side of the cross with a nail drive through each of the heels of the victim.

Regardless of how Jesus was attached to the cross, the method of death was asphyxiation as he weakened and he could no longer lift his body to breath. His weight crushed in on his chest. It was a cruel and gruesome means of execution.

### **Why the nails?**

In my mind in thinking about John's mention of nail prints in Jesus hands, I wonder, "why the nails?" "Is there any significance for our understanding of Jesus' work to be found in the nails?" "Is it merely a product of the story that Jesus had to be attached by some means to the cross?"

None of the gospel writers make a big deal of how Jesus was attached to the cross as they tell about his crucifixion. They mention his clothes, carrying the cross, the plaque telling the crime, the spear that pierced his side. We have to wait until doubting Thomas makes his statement to hear that nails were used – Jesus was nailed to the cross.

It seems Thomas really wanted to believe Jesus was alive and conquered death. Yet this is a tough story to believe. Dead men don't just get up and start walking again. Jesus had shown himself and his wounds to the other disciples. Now Thomas wanted to see for himself. He was struggling to accept the word of the other disciples who had seen Jesus. *"I want to see the nail prints so I can believe."*

It is easy to be critical of Thomas for his doubt. But he is not different than most of us. We too need evidence that brings us to the place we can take a leap of faith to trust Jesus fully. It may be when we first receive Him as Lord and Savior or it may be at any point along our journey. It may come when we are called to step out in faith. It may come when we have grown cold in our relationship with him and it is a call for renewal.

The nail prints are confirmation of a loving Savior who was willing to meet Thomas where he was and provide the evidence that he need to believe. This is the nature of the One who was nailed to the cross. He comes to us in unique ways we need so we too will believe. He best knows what we need in order to believe.

So I wonder what do you need to believe at this point of your journey with Jesus. Are you open to responding to him now?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, show us your nail prints so we might believe and accept the full work you did on the cross. Show us your nail prints so we might believe and enter into the fullness of life you have for us. Show us Lord what it is we need to see and to experience. Thank-you.