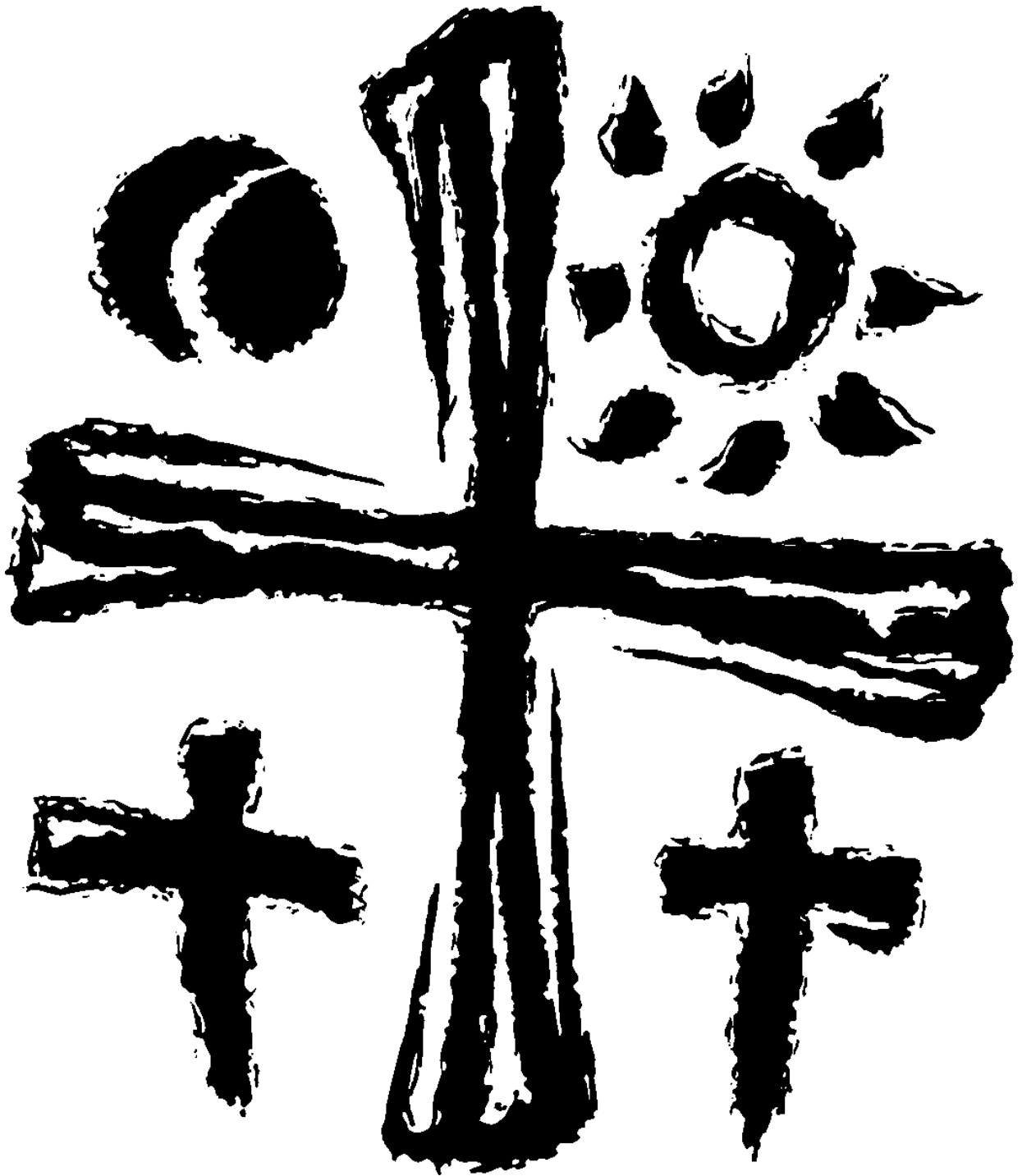


GOOD FRIDAY
STATIONS OF THE CROSS:
MEDITATIONS ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST



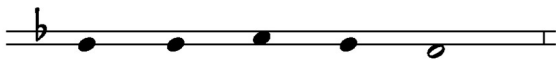
ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
294 MAIN STREET SOUTH, WOODBURY, CT

Good Friday Ecumenical Community Worship Service
Friday, March 29, 2024 at 7:00 pm
St. Paul's Episcopal Church

All stand as the ministers enter in silence.

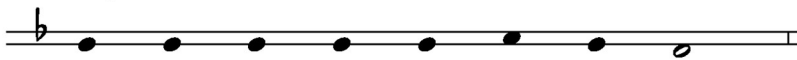
All then kneel as able for silent prayer, after which the Celebrant stands and begins the liturgy with the collect of the day.

Celebrant



Bless - ed be our God.

People



For ev - er and ev - er. A - men.

Let us pray: Crucified Savior, naked God, You hang disgraced and powerless. Grieving, we dare to hope, as we wait at the cross with your mother and your friend. Hear this prayer for your love's sake. ***Amen.***

All are seated.

Hebrews 10:16-25

Lector: A reading from the letter to the Hebrews.

The Holy Spirit testifies saying,

"This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, says the Lord:

I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds,"

he also adds,

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Lector: Here ends the reading.

People: **Thanks be to God.**

GLORY & PRAISE #122 PSALM 22: MY GOD, MY GOD

Cantor sings through one time, all repeat; Cantor sing verses and all sing refrain after each verse.



1. All who see me laugh at me. They shake their heads, they shake their heads. You trusted in God; let God deliver you, deliver you, if God loves you.
2. Closely, now they press me 'round, and pierce me through, they pierce me through. You trusted in God; let God deliver you, deliver you, if God loves you.
3. All is taken, all is lost. Be near, my help. Come near, my help. I trusted in God, may God deliver me. O deliver me as you love me. **(to Verse 4)**
4. I long to stand in the midst of your people, and sing your name. Give God your laud. Cry out your praises, and hold fast, hold fast to your Lord.

THE PASSION

Note: The customary responses before and after the Gospel are omitted.

Gospeler: The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John.

Pontius Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying:

Congregation: 'Hail, King of the Judeans!'

And they struck him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, 'Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.' So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, 'Here is the man!' When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted,

Congregation: 'Crucify him! Crucify him!'

Pilate said to them, 'Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.' The people answered him,

Congregation: 'We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.'

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters* again and asked Jesus, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, 'Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.' From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the people cried out,

Congregation: 'If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.'

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat* on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew* Gabbatha.

Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Judeans, 'Here is your King!' They cried out,

Congregation: 'Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!'

Pilate asked them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered,

Congregation: 'We have no king but the emperor.'

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.

All stand.

There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth,* the King of the Judeans.' Many of the Judeans read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew,* in Latin, and in Greek.

Then the chief priests said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Judeans", but, "This man said, I am King of the Judeans."' Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.'

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. So they said to one another,

Congregation: 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.'

This was to fulfil what the scripture says,

'They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.'

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. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture), 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Judeans did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows* that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.'

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Judeans, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Judeans. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

All are seated.

Silence.

THE OFFERTORY

Hymn #168

O Sacred Head, sore wounded, vs. 1, 2, 4

Hymnal 1982

As is tradition, our offertory on Good Friday benefits the *Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East*. This year the need for this Good Friday Offering is especially stark. The Good Friday Offering affirms the dignity of the poor, the war-torn, and those in desperate need as God's ministry is done.

- ❖ Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City provides critical medical care to all people, in peacetime and wartime alike.
- ❖ St. George's is the only Anglican church in Iraq, serving local Indigenous communities and displaced people through worship, schools, and medical care.
- ❖ Christ Church in Aden, Yemen, serves as the grounds of Ras Morbat Eye Clinic, providing critical medical care for all in a war-torn country.
- ❖ The Christian National Kindergarten at St. Philip's Episcopal Church, Nablus, in the West Bank, provides high-quality early education to all kindergartners, regardless of religion.

Thank you for spreading hope's message through your gifts and prayers.

THE SOLEMN COLLECTS

All stand.

Deacon: Dear People of God: Our heavenly Father sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved; that all who believe in him might be delivered from the power of sin and death, and become heirs with him of everlasting life.

We pray, therefore, for people everywhere according to their needs.

Let us pray for the holy Catholic Church of Christ throughout the world;

For its unity in witness and service

For all bishops and other ministers

and the people whom they serve

For all Christians in this community

That God will confirm his Church in faith, increase it in love, and preserve it in peace.

Silence

Deacon: Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Minister: Let us pray for all nations and peoples of the earth, and for those in authority among them;
For Joseph, the President of the United States
For the Congress and the Supreme Court
For the Members and Representatives of the United Nations
For all who serve the common good.

That by God's help they may seek justice and truth, and live in peace and concord.

Silence

Almighty God, kindle, we pray, in every heart the true love of peace, and guide with your wisdom those who take counsel for the nations of the earth; that in tranquility your dominion may increase, until the earth is filled with the knowledge of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Minister: Let us pray for all who suffer and are afflicted in body or in mind;
For the hungry and the homeless, the destitute
and the oppressed

For the sick, the wounded, and the crippled
For those in loneliness, fear, and anguish
For those who face temptation, doubt, and despair
For the sorrowful and bereaved
For prisoners and captives, and those in mortal danger

That God in his mercy will comfort and relieve them, and grant them the knowledge of his love, and stir up in us the will and patience to minister to their needs.

Silence

Gracious God, the comfort of all who sorrow, the strength of all who suffer: Let the cry of those in misery and need come to you, that they may find your mercy present with them in all their afflictions; and give us, we pray, the strength to serve them for the sake of him who suffered for us, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Minister: Let us pray for all who have not received the Gospel of Christ;
For those who have never heard the word of salvation
For those who have lost their faith
For those hardened by sin or indifference
For the contemptuous and the scornful
For those who are enemies of the cross of Christ and persecutors of his disciples
For those who in the name of Christ have persecuted others
That God will open their hearts to the truth, and lead them to faith and obedience.

Silence

Merciful God, creator of all the peoples of the earth and lover of souls: Have compassion on all who do not know you as you are revealed in your Son Jesus Christ; let your Gospel be preached with grace and power to those who have not heard it; turn the hearts of those who resist it; and bring home to your fold those who have gone astray; that there may be one flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Celebrant: Let us commit ourselves to God, and pray for the grace of a holy life, that, with all who have departed this world and have died in the peace of Christ, and those whose faith is known to God alone, we may be accounted worthy to enter into the fullness of the joy of our Lord, and receive the crown of life in the day of resurrection.

Silence

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Celebrant: And now, as our savior Christ has taught us we are bold to say,

**All: Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

All remain standing for the hymn.

Hymn #171

Go to Dark Gethsemane

Hymnal 1982

All are seated.

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

PROLOGUE

Another day, another accusation of insurrection. This was life under the so-called “Roman peace” in first century Jerusalem. Another arrest, another sham trial. At the center of the governor’s courtyard stood one Jesus of Nazareth. He was a known healer, exorcist, teacher, preacher – and trouble maker. Many said that he called himself the Son of God. Some said that he was the Messiah. The week of the Passover he entered the city being hailed like a king! He caused a scene at the Temple during the time of preparation. No one should have been surprised when he was arrested like a common criminal – though everyone present suspected that there was nothing common about him. Friends,

enemies, bystanders, officials from the temple and from Rome, soldiers, and onlookers – everyone who encountered this Jesus had a story to tell. Everyone came away changed.

As we listen to their secret thoughts of cowardice and courage, skepticism and faith, cruelty and compassion, despair and hope, will we see reflections of ourselves? As we enter into their stories, will our lives also be changed?

Hymn #172

Were you there?

Hymnal 1982

All: Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

1. Jesus is Condemned to Die

I was there.

I am Pilate, the Governor of Syria. Of course I was there.

Was this man innocent? What an irrelevant question. When I released this Jesus to be crucified – when I washed my hands of the whole affair – I was protecting what matters most: the common peace, the “Pax Romana.” I’ve committed thousands of people to die in the same way for similar reasons, and never thought twice about it. I’m a soldier, after all, and soldiers understand the grim necessity of killing to protect public order. I’m also a politician, so I understand the necessity of pleasing the powers that be – the ones back in Rome, the ones in the Temple, and the one sitting in a gilded palace bearing his own name here in Jerusalem. It’s not collusion – it’s practicality. It’s not corruption – it’s playing the game. Everybody does it, sometimes less, sometimes more.

If I felt a twinge of conscience about this, if my wife’s bad dream kept me awake that night, I had to push that aside. I’ve done that before, too. Maybe I believed in such a thing as “good” and “evil” once upon a time, maybe I believed in such a thing as “truth” when I was young and didn’t know any better, but now – enh. What is truth? At the end of the day, you have to do what’s right for you, regardless. Why bother with ideas like “innocent” or “guilty”? After all, it really is Might that makes Right, and what could be mightier in Jerusalem than an understanding between the voice of the Empire, Herod, and the Chief Priest? At the end of the day, I just go along to get along.

And anyway, don’t we all do the same thing? Can you honestly look me in the eye and tell me that you haven’t done the same thing?

Were you there when they let Barabbas go? Were you there when they let Barabbas go? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they let Barabbas go?

2. Jesus takes up his cross

I was there.

I am Barrabas. Rebel, zealot, convicted for putting my money where my mouth is. If you want anything to change around here, it’s going to take violence to do it.

Ha! It was a smart trick getting off the hook! All it took was a little money in the right places, a few people planted in the mob shouting the right things, and then I was free! If Pilate figured that the mob would call out to release Jesus, and let him off the hook, then his plan backfired. And yeah, I guess it’s too bad about that Galilean preacher having to take my place, but better him than me. All that “peace” and “love” was never going to change things anyway. I mean. Maybe in a perfect world,

but this world is definitely not perfect. You have to be a realist if you want to get things done. I prefer speaking my mind with a sword in hand. Better yet, I just let the sword do the talking.

Still. I was curious about this Jesus of Nazareth. I almost felt sorry for the guy, you know? He's not your common criminal, that was easy to see. But what wasn't easy to see – what was actually hard to watch – was watching Jesus pick up the beam of his cross. I knew what I had done, and I was relieved to be out of Pilate's jail, but this guy? What did he do, what did he *really* do, to deserve this?

All: Were you there when they scorned him as he fell? Were you there when they scorned him as he fell? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they scorned him as he fell?

3. Jesus falls for the first time

I was there.

I am a Man from Jerusalem. No names, please.

I was just a bystander in this huge crowd. I have seen and heard him speak many times, this Jesus from Nazareth. I was on the hill that day when he fed so many people, and once I watched as he gave a blind man his sight. Today I saw him stagger and then fall—prostrate—on the ground. It was devastating. I wonder, could *this* actually be the Messiah?

Could God truly be on the ground, in the dust?

Each time he fell, I watched with terrible anxiety. The third time he went down, I thought that he might already be dead. But then he got up again and continued on to Calvary. His strength made me reflect on my own weakness: weakness that leaves me stupefied and empty at times.

In the cobblestones of the road where his knee went down hard, a little weed struggled to grow. It reminded me of that thing he told his friends recently: A seed must die to yield its golden grain. Is this the kind of dying he meant? Is this why he did not resist when he began this terrible journey?

Were you there when his mother saw him there? Were you there when his mother saw him there? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when his mother saw him there?

4. Jesus meets his mother

I was there.

I am the mother of Jesus, Mary. Once I was called “highly favored.” That day I remembered one of the meanings of my own name: bitterness.

I will never forget the day I first knew about you. A messenger wrapped in light, a whoosh of a dove's wings, the quickening pace of my pulse. Or another day when Simeon told me, on the day we brought you to the temple, that a grief like a sword would one day pierce my heart, which was beating hard once more. Soon I began to understand what he meant. You were twelve years old when you first informed me that your Father's business meant more than my own claim of motherhood on you. That was very hard to hear, and it took me a long time to understand. Later, at that wonderful wedding in Cana I began to see more fully how and why your life would continue to unfold as it did. I have been in awe of you, even when I have been bewildered by you, even when I have been so very afraid for you.

But there was nothing that could ever keep you from my love – not height, nor depth, nor angels, nor demons, not Herod or Pilate, not that terrible walk toward Golgotha. I was with you to the very end, my beloved child.

Were you there when they led him up the hill? Were you there when they led him up the hill? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they led him up the hill?

5. Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross

I was there.

I am Simon, from the city of Cyrene.

He did not know me. I am a foreigner, a Greek Jew from Northern Africa. We Cyrenean Jews know what it is to be persecuted, rounded up some 300 years ago by a different king. We are not strangers to injustice. Maybe that's why I watched the procession of the condemned that day – if I cannot stop pain of the world I can at least look, bear witness to the people who suffer in it.

Being a witness to suffering always carries a cost – and that day it was a heavy one indeed. This poor man, broken and bleeding, was struggling to drag his crossbeam through the crowded streets. I gasped when I looked at his face, looked into his eyes. Such pain, and sorrow, and something else I could not name even as I felt it pierce my heart. When one of the soldiers saw my face, he urged me forward with his spear. “Pick it up,” he said. “You carry it now.” It was not a request.

The *patibulum*, the Latin name for the cross beam, was dense, awkward, and heavy. It had clearly been used before – I saw nail holes and blood stains in the wood, ominous souvenirs of their former bearers. As I dragged the beam along, grunting and struggling, the condemned man tried to speak, but the soldier jabbed me in the back. “Hurry up, you! We don't have all day!” I picked up the wood of the cross and followed. Being a witness to the real pain of injustice has a price. And yet. And yet I cannot say that I regret having been part of this forced act of mercy.

Were you there when she wiped his holy face? Were you there when she wiped his holy face? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when she wiped his holy face?

6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

I was there.

I am Veronica, a widow and, for a time, a mother.

When did I first see him? It must have been about three years ago. He was so young and strong, like David or Elijah, or even Moses. He said things that I had never even thought of, things I am not sure I understand even now. They say he blasphemed. Those liars! He was closer to God than anyone I ever knew. Why is that that they kill all the good ones, God?

Since my husband has died, I have been so lonely. My children, too, are gone. I have wondered if my own life still mattered to God, since it doesn't seem to matter to anyone else. But I mattered to him, to Jesus. He called me and people like me “blessed.” That I would be comforted in my grief. He promised that my reward would be great in heaven. When he spoke, the heaviness weighing down my heart lifted. I listened to his words and tilted my face to the sky. For the first time in years, as I sat on the side of that mountain, I felt the warmth of the hope in my heart as I felt the sun on my skin. You never forget a feeling like that.

When I saw him on the street that day I couldn't believe it. His beautiful face, smeared with dirt and blood. If I didn't know him so well, I couldn't tell who he was. God, how he must have hurt.

I thought about my own little ones, and their messy faces. I thought about how I would wipe them with a rag, pat their cheeks, and send them on their way. As I walked toward him, drawing up the length of my veil, my gesture was instinctive, practiced. I knelt to wipe the blood and sweat and mud from his eyes. I thought of the tenderness of his voice as I cupped his cheek in my hand. It was only for

a moment, then he was pushed forward on his way. The image of his face will be with me for the rest of my life.

Were you there when stumbled to the ground? Were you there when stumbled to the ground? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when stumbled to the ground?

7. Jesus falls for the second time

I was there.

I am Martha of Bethany. I was his friend, the one who came out to meet him. He came when Lazarus fell. I could not let him make that treacherous journey alone.

My life with Jesus has been marked by many unbelievable things. The day my brother Lazarus died, I could not believe that Jesus was not there. My sister Mary and I felt so abandoned and hopeless. When he came the next day – too late, I thought bitterly – I couldn't believe that my heart could soften in his presence. When he said that the resurrection wasn't just for the last day, but that he himself was the resurrection, I surprised myself again because I knew in my heart that it was true – I believed him. And when Lazarus came out of the tomb, alive – ALIVE! – my sorrow and disbelief was transformed into joy.

And yet. Watching my friend fall again in pain and agony challenged my ability to believe that anything good could come from this moment. The joy of that day in Bethany felt unbelievable in the presence of such agony.

It was clear that this sorrowful road will end in death. And yet, is it possible, that there could be new life, even after death on a cross?

Were you there when they wept for love of him? Were you there when they wept for love of him? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they wept for love of him?

8. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem

I was there.

I am a Woman of Jerusalem. My name won't be remembered, but I was there all the same. Women have been with Jesus from his birth, and we remain with him through his death. That is what we do.

So, my friend, Jesus, it came to this at last. After all this time, they finally had their way. I am not surprised, but I cannot stop weeping all the same.

I came to see you often, and you never turned me away. I never felt that I was someone important: I have always kept in the shadow of someone else's life. The other women and I used to say that you were the only man who ever understood what it is to be a woman. We found in you a man who dared to accept women as his companions. You elevated us. You gave us dignity. You taught us our value, that we were your sisters and you called us children of God. Do you know what that means to us? There were no second-class citizens with you, no "male" or "female", only heirs of God's promise of salvation, of new and abundant life.

So we were there. Because we are always there. We never deserted you. Where did all the men go? When you stopped, when you turned to speak to us, what was it that you said? Ah, yes: "Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and your children." You knew perfectly well that we have wept for our children, again and again, that we are like the voice of Rachel heard in Ramah. Even in these hard words, I knew that you have felt our pain, that you have seen our hurt. I knew, too, that you long for the end of our suffering, even as we longed for the end of yours.

Were you there when stumbled to the ground? Were you there when stumbled to the ground? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when stumbled to the ground?

9. *Jesus falls for the third time*

I was there.

I am Cephas. Peter. His friend. Or, at least, I used to be.

Three times. Three times Jesus fell onto the hard road. The third one went into my heart like a nail. Three times I had the chance to stick up for my friend – my best friend, my teacher, my Lord. Jesus is the one who called me from my old life into experiences beyond anything I could ask or imagine! I have seen a hungry crowd fed with no more than five loaves and two fishes. I have witnessed Jesus in the presence of Moses and Elijah on the top of a mountain. I have walked on water toward him. In his presence I have been witness to countless healings, seen miracles beyond comprehension, discovered what justice truly means. He told us that we would need to deny ourselves and take up our crosses. As Jesus' right-hand man, I nodded along, certain that I would do just that when the time came.

And when the time came in the garden, what did I do? I pulled out my sword and attacked the only unarmed man within reach. I took the opportunity to deny knowing Jesus at all in Pilate's court. Not once, not twice, but three times. I can still hear the awful cockerel's cry. Three times I failed as a friend. And now, after watching him stumble and fall a third time on this terrible road, I feel like I've failed him again.

Were you there when mocked and stripped my Lord? Were you there when they mocked and stripped my Lord? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they mocked and stripped my Lord?

10. *Jesus is stripped of his garments*

I was there.

I am a soldier. And that day, I was the soldier on duty. I had a job to do and I did it.

Into my hands, Jesus of Nazareth! I was ordered to prepare you for your crucifixion. You were nothing important—just another backwater Galilean. I never cared much for Galileans – religious zealots, the lot of them. My job that day was to strip you naked before that screaming mob, waiting for the show to begin. I heard you were some kind of big deal with some of these zealots, that you had lots of followers, like a prophet or something. How did it feel, Galilean? Your buddies were gone. You were going to die abandoned, naked, and alone except for that bloodthirsty mob. Someone told me you could heal the sick, cast out demons, and even raise the dead. I told them I would believe it when I see it. Best thing going for you that day, near as I can tell, is that nice garment you were wearing. It looked like it was woven in one piece. Someone must have loved you once. Too bad they weren't here that day.

Oh, how I wish those who called themselves your "followers" in all the years and centuries to come could have seen what I saw, Galilean. Would they still love you then? Would they still want to call you "Savior"? Would they still paint you, pretty and pious, on their walls? Thinking of you then – what a joke!

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

11. *Jesus is nailed to the Cross*

I was there.

I was the one who nailed the Galilean to the cross.

He was half dead before I got him. What did he do, anyway? Well, it wasn't any of my business.

I always talked while I prepared the nails. I never liked doing this, didn't like it at all. Hated it, every time, but never more than that day. They made me do it. They said I'd get the same if I didn't.

I'd always tell 'em, "don't be afraid to scream. It will help you bear the pain. I don't know what you did or why you're here. But don't fight it. Lie still."

That day they were in a real hurry. They kept yelling at me to get started. When the soldiers offered him gall, he just pursed his lips and turned away Why wouldn't he drink that gall? It dulls the senses.

Well, that was his business, and I couldn't be bothered with it, as I had my own. But I didn't like the way he watched me while I went about it. He didn't curse me or spit or anything as most of 'em do.

Just. Watched me with them eyes of his. It was unsettling, I can tell you that much for nothing.

First, the left hand... [PAUSE FOR HAMMERING SOUND]. Next, the right... [PAUSE FOR HAMMERING SOUND]. "Scream it out!" I says, "won't be long now." I'd take hold of a foot. "Don't kick now! Hold those feet still. You won't feel a thing in another hour." Then both the feet, together... [PAUSE FOR HAMMERING SOUND]. I always said that, though truth be told I'm not sure that was true. I hoped it was.

They put this sign up over his head, read "King of the Jews." Didn't seem much like a king to me.

Were you there when he saved the dying thief? Were you there when he saved the dying thief? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when he saved the dying thief?

12. *Jesus dies on the Cross*

I was there.

I am Dismas. I was there because I was a thief who was stupid enough to get caught.

There were three of us there that day: me, another guy who was as mean as the day is long, and this Jesus from Nazareth. The guy on the other side of Jesus was a demon in life, and he's doing his best to be a demon in death, cursing and mocking everyone around. His special attention was reserved for that one in the middle. I recognized him—he was that Galilean. Jesus. They called him the Messiah... and they said he was a king. Maybe he was, I didn't know.

I knew that I was in pain – suffocating, agonizing pain. I refused to scream – until I couldn't take it any more. I didn't want to give them Roman soldiers the satisfaction of my pain or let them know how much it hurts! I tried to be as strong as that poor fool who was dying beside me.

That other guy, he's dealing with the pain by making fun of the Galilean, right along with the soldiers standing around. "Save yourself, if you think you're the Son of God! And save us while you're at it!" The crowd thought that was hilarious, but I saw no humor in it. I couldn't figure how he was hanging there same as us just because he gave hope to a bunch of cripples and outcasts. He was hurting at least as bad as I was, but he didn't deserve it, not a bit of it. I yelled at him to leave Jesus alone – we're getting what we asked for, but he did nothing wrong.

And, I don't know what exactly came over me, except that, maybe he was the King of the Jews or the Messiah or something else I couldn't explain. I said, "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."

He said, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

I was dying, and I finally found someone who cares. I was dying, but my heart was free and my soul was at peace.

Were you there when he yielded up his soul? Were you there when he yielded up his soul? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when he yielded up his soul?

13. Jesus is taken down from the Cross

I was there.

I am Mary of Clopas, a woman he called “aunt.”

For thirty-three years I have stood by my sister’s side. I held her newborn boy, named for Joshua, the great hero. I listened as she told the story of the trip to Bethlehem and his amazing birth. I celebrated with the family when he was presented the first time at the temple, and again when he came of age. I clucked my tongue when my sister told me about the wedding at Cana, and wondered where this might all lead.

And I watched again as his mother received the body of her first-born son when he was removed from that awful wooden beam. It doesn’t matter how old the mother or the child, the death of your own baby is unimaginable. Her cries of anguish are as deep as labor pains.

When we laid him out, he seemed so small, so light. We wrapped him up in linen cloths, swaddled him like an infant, mopping up the water and the blood around his unbroken body. How could someone so full of life, so radiant with God’s love and light be reduced to this? I know what he said. I know what he promised. And I heard him cry out to God, bewildered and abandoned. As I helped his mother attend his body, it took everything I had not to curse God and be done with it.

But Jesus made promises – to his friends, his followers, and to his mother. It was not my place to question them. That day was not for questions – that day was for being present. For making the space for grief as big as the void before the first light.

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb? Were you there when they laid him in the tomb? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

14. Jesus is laid in the tomb

I was there.

I am Joseph of Arimathea.

Oh, Nicodemus, how did it ever come to this? How is it that you and I became actors in the final scene of this most wretched drama? If there were even a hint of reason for what our leaders did... but there is no justification! Do you realize what we did? We buried the crucified body of our Messiah! A man full of respect for the Law. What happened, Nicodemus?

We warned the council... we told them their actions perverted the spirit as well as the letter of the Law. It would have been one thing for them to have condemned a common criminal. But this is disgraceful! I tell you, I heard this man. His words and deeds fulfilled the Law.

I know that you think I acted beneath my station in begging that coward Pilate for the body. But I would go on my knees a thousand times to do what I did. Somewhere, some day, I want people to look back at this moment of shame and say, “Here is a man who said NO to this evil, to these lies, to this slander against the sons of Abraham.

But it’s over now. He is wrapped up tight. I suppose we should go. Just one last time, Nicodemus, tell me what he said to you on that night we went to him, the part about our need to be born again. I’ll never forget that. Born again: Born of the Spirit. Everyone who believes in him has eternal life. Well, it

was a beautiful thought. I really hoped that it would happen. I guess it was just a dream, too much to hope for.

Let's go, Nicodemus. Let's roll the stone in place.

Were you there when they rolled the stone away? Were you there when they rolled the stone away? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they rolled the stone away?

15. The third day

I am here.

I am Mary of Magdala.

How I dread facing this day. Yesterday was bad enough!

When I awoke, I thought for one brief moment that the events of Friday were just some horrible nightmare. How I wanted to run home to my father, as I had so often done as a girl, to receive his assurance that I had nothing to fear. Now I must get up and go to the tomb. How empty and heavy I feel. Oh, God! Why are you so cruel?

But I cannot keep this up. I must carry on. I must help Peter and the others. What will we all do? If only I could understand what it all meant. I want it all to be just a dream. But, no, it is all too real.

Why did he insist on going to Jerusalem when we all warned him against it? If only he hadn't gone. We would all be safe now—he, I, all of us. It would be just like it was before. I could be near him. I could talk with him, eat with him, be with him. I even—I must never admit this to anyone—I even hoped that he would somehow do for himself what he did for Lazarus. "I am the Resurrection" he said. What can that mean? How can he be the resurrection when he's dead?

There's the tomb. What's this? The stone is moved! He's gone! They've stolen his body! What will I do now? I must tell Peter and John! We will find him!

This... this will change everything...

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Epilogue

PILATE: We were not there. We are Christians living today.

BAR.: We did not witness the violence at Calvary or see where they placed his body in the tomb.

MAN: But as a baptized Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ is present when anyone is killed, tortured, or humiliated.

MARY: We believe Jesus Christ is with all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit.

SIMON: We also believe that suffering and death are not the end of the story— resurrection is. Hope is. Love is.

VER.: As members of the body of Christ, Resurrection means that our lives are no longer threatened by death but continue in Christ.

MARTHA: As Christians, we faithfully await the resurrection of our own bodies and life everlasting.

WOMAN: Resurrection also means that the risen Lord does not confine his activity to the church where we worship, but that he penetrates the entire cosmos.

PETER: Christ's presence can be felt in every place, and in every person.

- SOLDIER: We believe that we are charged with caring for God’s creation as an expression of our worship.
- NAILER: This means that the risen Lord continues to live—in history and today, in all persons and communities.
- DISMA: This means that the Spirit of the risen Lord fills us up, transforming us and empowering us to carry on his own earthly ministry.
- MARY C.: This means that all of us are now asked to forgive one another, to heal human brokenness, and break human divisions.
- JOSEPH: This means that we are called to share Hope and Love with all people.
- MARY M.: No matter their economic status, educational background, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, religion, race, disability, or criminal history.

Closing Prayer

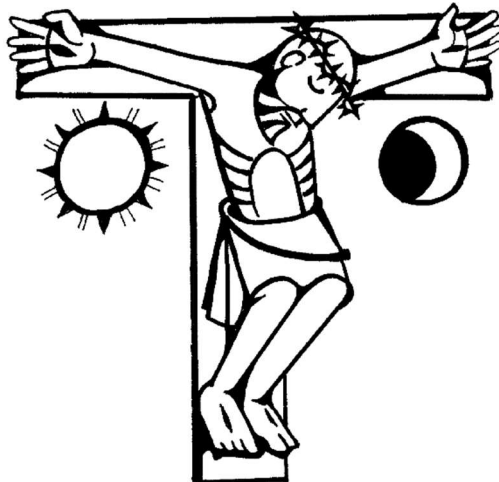
Lord, it is not over. You suffer with us until the end of time. Together we will help you carry the burden that you have assumed and made divine. When the road is hard and monotonous, when it leads to the grave, waiting for your glory.

Lord Jesus, help us travel faithfully along our roads, in company with you in the vastness of creation. Help us above all to recognize you in the faces of our pilgrim siblings, and to serve you with love.

May we walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice for God.

All: Amen.

Ministers and people depart in silence.

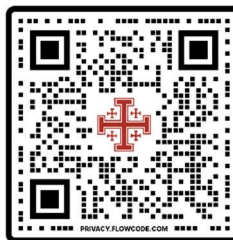


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Participants in this Service

Organist: *Kristin Daigneault*

Ministers:

The Rev. Tuesday Rupp, Rector, St. Paul's Church

The Rev. Brian Bodt, Pastor, Woodbury United Methodist Church

The Rev. Sandy Koenig, Pastor, North Congregational Church

The Rev. David Rhodes, Deacon, St. Paul's Church

Phoebe Oler, Ministerial Intern, St. Paul's Church

Readers: *Carol Galloway; Karen Nash; Rev. Tuesday; Jeff Hunt; Ed Hord; Meg Temple; Rev. Brian; Sandy Purdy; Betty Lou Bowles; Carol Quimby; Peter Bowles; Pastor Sandy; Russ DePace; Laura Daly; Phoebe Oler*

Celebrate Easter with St. Paul's

March 30	Holy Saturday: Easter Vigil <i>with the Lighting of the New Fire</i>	7:00 pm
March 31	The Sunday of the Resurrection: Easter Sunday Easter Day Holy Eucharist Easter Egg Hunt, Brunch & Celebration	10:00 am 11:00 am

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