

Good Friday Tenebrae Service – The Fear of the Lord

Drama Script, monologue

Preparation: Two or more readers are needed and small lamps for pulpit and musicians. Slips of paper and pens are distributed in the pews/chairs or by ushers as people enter the sanctuary. Six Lenten candles and a Christ candle are lit, and a lamp/spotlight is shining on the cross. As the service begins, the other lights are turned off. Hymn lyrics are projected onto a screen so that hymnals aren't needed in the darkness. Additional option: icons or images for each of the scenes of the Passion story can be projected as the readings unfold.

Gathering Hymn: Were You There When They Crucified My Lord? (omit last verse)

Introduction:

Our Lenten journey has led us to this somber day. We have spent these weeks bringing our fears and naming them before God and each other, reminding one another that love is stronger than fear.

As we turn our hearts and minds to the story of Jesus' passion and death from the Gospel of Mark this evening, we do so with an awareness of the different fears faced by the various figures in this biblical narrative. Entering this ancient story, we wonder what it was like to be there, to face the various fears that the disciples, the religious authorities, the political leaders, even Jesus himself faced in that time and place. And we wonder also at how their fears aren't really all that different from the fears we face today in our time and place. At the end of the service, there will be an opportunity to write down the fears that we have using the slips of paper and pens found in the pews, and these will be collected as a way of handing them over to God.

This service is framed using the notion of the Fear of the Lord. This is a term, on one hand, that is used to speak about the proper awe and love of God that is the way of Wisdom in the Bible – the fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom, we are told in Proverbs. On the other hand, this also reminds us that Jesus' way of the cross was a fearful one – in the Garden, Jesus was afraid of what lay before him. In this way, we remember the wisdom of the cross, the truth of worshipping the crucified one: that there is no part of our human experience – not fear, not suffering, not death or grief – that remains untouched by God's hand. God has taken it all up into God's care.

Scripture Text: Mark 14:17-25

Judas Monologue:

I was afraid that the revolution wasn't going to go anywhere. I had seen Jesus do radical things – he had gotten crowds on his side, shouting Hosanna; he had performed miracles that left people in awe; he had cleared the Temple of the money-changers and those trying to profit from people's piety.

But in every case, he hadn't gone far enough for me – he hadn't fought back with the sword, like the Maccabees, who used force to take control of Judah. Jesus' way of peace was too slow. So, I thought I would give Jesus the push he needed to start a real revolution. If they arrested him, he'd have to fight back with power and force.

So I told the chief priests where he'd be, and I took their money. Sure, I felt strange at the Passover meal, when Jesus seemed to somehow know what I had done. But it was for a good cause. The revolution was everything to me. I didn't care how we got there, I just wanted those Romans overthrown and done away with. And I knew Jesus could do that if he got his priorities straight.

Extinguish Candle

Hymn: Stay with Me

Scripture Text: Mark 14:26-50

Monologue on Jesus:

Like any of us would be, Jesus was afraid. In the garden that night, the prospect of his own imminent suffering and death was overwhelming. Not only was he going to be arrested, subjected to the humiliating spectacle of two trials, and tortured to death on a cross, but his own friend, Judas, was the one who would hand him over to this fate. And the rest of his male disciples would scatter, abandoning him.

So he was distressed and agitated, telling his friends, "I am deeply grieved, even to death." Our Christ, our Messiah, was afraid. Emmanuel, God-with-us, suffered fear. And so he prayed to his "Abba" to take away the cup of suffering, to find some other way.

He did not want to cross over into death, he did not want to experience "godforsakenness," separation from God. And yet he went ahead, walking the difficult road set before him, taking the fullness of human experience – even suffering, even fear, even death – upon himself.

Extinguish Candle

Hymn: 'Tis Midnight and on Olive's Brow

Scripture Text: Mark 14:53-65

Caiaphas Monologue:

That Jesus of Nazareth was a troublemaker. That's all there was to it. Didn't he know we were under military occupation, that he couldn't simply wander around the countryside riling up the peasants with all his talk of blessed are the poor and this upside-down kingdom of God nonsense? What was he thinking?

And then he escalated everything with marching into the city of Jerusalem like some kind of peasant king, and turning over all the tables of the respectable merchants in the Temple. Why would he provoke the Romans so blatantly? Didn't he share the fear we all had – that the Romans would destroy the nation of Israel, and tear down our holy Temple?

He had to be stopped before he brought us all down with him. So thanks to Judas, we had him arrested and held a trial for him before the council. There, he was foolish enough to blaspheme in front of us, calling himself the Messiah, the Son of God, and so we had no choice but to condemn him to death.

Extinguish Candle

Special music

Scripture Text: Mark 14:66-72

Peter Monologue:

I had vowed to Jesus that I would never leave him, that none of us would. But that was before I knew that the threats we faced were real and serious. I couldn't believe it when I saw Jesus arrested – taken away by armed men, and for what? For preaching justice and peace? For healing people? For affirming their humanity as children of God?

So I and the other male disciples were terrified that Jesus might actually be killed, and that if the chief priests and the Romans could do that to Jesus, our beloved teacher, we might very well be next.

So when I was recognized, I blurted out that I didn't know him, that I wasn't one of his followers. Three times, I said I didn't know him, that I'd never met this Jesus. And then the rooster crowed, and I remembered what Jesus had said, and I sank down in shame and fear and wept bitterly.

Extinguish Candle

Scripture Text: Mark 15:1-15

Pilate Monologue:

They brought this man before me, this Jesus of Nazareth, and said that he needed to be put to death. But they presented no evidence, or certainly not enough to warrant the death penalty. So I tried to talk to the man, to get him to tell me his side of the story. I had heard rumors about him, how he had marched into the city in a kind of poor-man's version of a victory march, riding on a donkey of all things.

"Are you the King of the Jews?" I asked him. But he didn't give me a straight answer, saying something about not being the kind of king I was thinking of, and about being called to speak the truth. I asked, "But what is truth? Whose truth do you mean?" He didn't answer.

I didn't want to put an innocent man to death; I wanted no part in this scheme by the Temple leaders, who clearly had some grudge to settle. So I turned the decision over to the crowd, asking them whom they wanted released: Barabbas the rebel and murderer or the so-called King of the Jews. They shouted for Barabbas to be released. "Then what should I do with the King of the Jews?" The mob shouted, "Crucify him!" I tried to ask again what his crimes were, but they simply shouted for him to be crucified.

Well, the crowd had spoken. So I washed my hands of the whole mess, and handed him over to be crucified.

Extinguish Candle

Hymn: O Sacred Head Now Wounded

Scripture Text: Mark 15:16-41

Special Music

Mary Magdalene Monologue:

We couldn't look away. Even though this was a living nightmare, that our dear Rabbi should be crucified, we couldn't leave his side.

So we women disciples stood at a distance, so that at least he would not be alone while he died this cruel and unjust death. I cried from anger as much as grief – how could Judas have betrayed him like this? How could the Temple leaders have been so threatened by him that they thought he deserved this? How could Pilate, the Roman governor, have gone along with the crowd to have him killed this way?

No one should have to die feeling utterly forsaken, even by God. Especially Jesus, who was such a thoughtful and gentle soul, who made all of us feel worthy and beloved. As his friend and disciple, it was almost too much for me to bear.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus Monologue:

It's a parent's worst fear to outlive their child, never mind to have their child taken from them, tortured to death by the occupiers. And yet here was my child, my first-born son, hung high upon a cross.

I had known that Jesus' teaching was risky – of course his messages of shalom and blessing of the poor would be seen by some as radical, even revolutionary. But anyone who knew him also knew that he would never instigate violence – his was the way of peace.

Perhaps it was my fault, for raising him the way I did. I could have taught him to keep his head down and accept the way things are, occupation and all. But I taught him our Hebrew traditions, our hope for God's peace and justice to flow like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Instead, he was met with violence and betrayal, and his own blood was spilled.

"How long, O Lord?" I prayed while he was suffering. And when it was over, I had no more words left; only tears.

Extinguish candle and Christ candle

Scripture Text: Mark 15:42-47

Monologue on Fear:

Our fears today are not much different from those of our forebears in faith. We, too, are afraid long-awaited justice and peace will not come, or are threatened by unexpected change. We, too, are afraid of broken relationships and violence that tear us apart. We, too, are afraid of suffering and death. Today, our God is dead and buried, and we are afraid that we have been forsaken.

Soft light turned on

Now, in the shadows of our own Gethsemane, let us bring our fears to the foot of the cross, offering them to be crucified and buried with Christ.

In the pew in front of you, there are slips of paper and pens. We invite you to write down one of your own fears – something we have named during Lent or this evening, or something else.

Once you have written down one of your fears, we invite you to place it in the offering plate as it is passed around. Once all fears have been gathered, we will lay them at the foot of the cross, and leave this place in darkness and silence. As you write, please join in singing:

Hymn: Jesus, Remember Me (repeating)

Fears are written down, collected by ushers, and soft light turned off. Ushers lay fears at foot of cross. Moment of silence. Then soft light is turned on for people to exit the sanctuary.

Susanne Guenther Loewen, Nutana Park Mennonite Church (Canada), 2019.
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