

GOOD FRIDAY PRAYER VIGIL AT THE HOURS
 April 15, 2022 12-3pm
 First Church of Christ in Longmeadow

Today's Prayer Vigil commemorates the period from 12:00 Noon to 3:00 pm when our Lord Jesus was hung on the cross and died on the Friday before His resurrection. There will be four corporate prayer services at 12:00 noon, 1:00 pm, 2:00 pm and 3:00 pm, for ten-fifteen minutes each. This year we are doing this live in person, and showing it also on Facebook and YouTube. The intervening times provide opportunity for personal prayer and reading. We will be reflecting on the last seven words Jesus said as he hung on the cross, according to the four gospels.

Meditative Reading Options:

During the hours in between our devotions, you may like to read scripture or spend time in contemplation. Here are some reading suggestions:

The Bible: You may enjoy reading any part of the bible, but we direct you in particular to consider Isaiah 11, 35, 51, 55, 58; Jeremiah 9,10; the Psalms, Hosea 11, 14; Joel. In the New Testament, consider Mark 13 to the end, Matthew 26 to the end; Luke 22 to the end, John 12 to the end.

12:00 NOON PRAYER SERVICE

Opening Words

THE LESSON Isaiah 52:13 -53:7

Silence

Psalm 42 Bible

THE HYMN *Just As I Am* V. 1 #207 New Century Hymnal (black)

Just as I am, without one plea, but that your blood was shed for me, and that you called inviting me, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

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The First Words

Forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing. (Luke 23:34)

Scripture:

“Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with Jesus. When they came to the place that is called Golgotha or the Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said God, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. And they cast lots for his clothing. And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at Jesus and the soldiers also mocked him.” (Luke 23:32-35)

One: Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, “Forgiving is not forgetting; its actually remembering--remembering and not using your right to hit back. It’s a second chance for a new beginning. And the remembering part is particularly important. Especially if you don’t want to repeat what happened.”

Let us take a moment of quiet to reflect on forgiveness – have we ever experienced the brokenness of harm without reconciliation? Is there someone we need to forgive now? Is there someone we need to go to ourselves for wrongs we have done?*1

Prayer: Before you die, Jesus Christ, and the world goes into deep darkness, take from our lives, from our souls, from our consciences, all that has offended you, all that has hurt others, and the intransigence which has made us numb to the plight of those whom we could help or heal. On this day, at this time, help us receive deeply in our hearts the only words that can set us free: your sins are forgiven, your sins are forgiven. Amen.*2

THE HYMN *Just As I Am* V. 2 #207 New Century Hymnal (black)

Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt, fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

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The Second Words

Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise. (Luke 23:43)

Scripture:

“One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in to your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:39-43)

One: Even in the midst of his own terrible suffering, Jesus responds to the man suffering beside him. As the Dalai Lama writes, “We live very close together. So our prime purpose in this life is to help others.”

Let us sit together in quiet that we might reflect on the place of compassion in our lives. When and why do we place limitations on our compassion? What holds us back from kindness? Are there times when we have given too much, and need to keep compassion for the healing of our own lives? *1

Prayer: Lord Jesus, remember us when you come into your kingdom. Remember us, not for our impressive resumes nor for the things which we hope will appear in our obituaries. Remember us, not for the virtues we occasionally display or for any credit we think we have in our moral account. Remember us, as one of the criminal community who hung at your side. Keep a place for us, Lord, when it is our time to come.*2

THE HYMN *Just As I Am* V. 3 #207 New Century Hymnal (black)

Just as I am, you will receive, will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because your promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

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1:00 pm PRAYER SERVICE

THE LESSON John 18:1-27 (Silence)

Psalm 51:1-9 – The Bible

THE HYMN *What Wondrous Love is This?* #223 v.1 NCH (black)

What wondrous love is this, O my soul! O my soul! What wondrous love is this, O my soul! What wondrous love is this! that Christ should come in bliss to bear the heavy cross for my soul, for my soul, to bear the heavy cross for my soul!

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The Third Words

Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother. (John 19:26-27)

“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. (John 19:25b-27)

In his poem *Self Portrait*, David Whyte writes:

I want to know if you know despair or can see it in others.
 I want to know if you are prepared to live in the world
 with its harsh need to change you. If you can look back
 with firm eyes saying this is where I stand.
 I want to know if you know how to melt into that fierce heat of living
 falling toward the center of your longing.
 I want to know if you are willing to live, day by day, with the
 consequence of love....*1

Prayer: O God, we pray for our families: where they are open, loving, supportive, that their joy might be kept safe; and where they are tense, troubled, fragmented, that they may find a way through pain to healing. We pray for ourselves connected across space to other people whose journey we have not travelled, whose depth of faith we do not know, whose potentials we cannot imagine, that we might somehow know we belong to each other; dear Jesus, if there is one of your family for whom we should care more fondly, direct our gaze to them, as you turned Mary to John, and John to Mary. Amen.*2

THE HYMN *What Wondrous Love is This?* #223 v 2 NCH (black)

To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing, to God and to the Lamb, I will sing; To God and to the Lamb who is the great I Am, while millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing; while millions join the theme, I will sing.

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The Fourth Words

Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Mark 15:34)

Scripture: *When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:33-34)*

Jesus quotes here from Psalm 22, a prayer of desperation but also of faith in the God who saves us from despair. What did he feel in this moment on the cross? If we follow Jesus, we must face our own suffering, the suffering of others known and unknown to us, and perhaps the suffering of the planet itself. But we might also practice trusting that there is "wisdom to be gained from traversing the arid terrain of hopelessness," as Elizabeth Roberts puts it. She writes, "Certainly when despair grows within us, it may feel hard to pray, but pray is what we must do. Pray to give voice to our

truth. Pray to avoid denial. Pray to remember that we are not the first, nor will we be the last to know the dark night of the soul.”

Let us sit in quiet that we might reflect on how we might summon strength in the face of hopelessness and despair. Where and from whom do we find courage? Who has shown us how to live in the midst of pain?*1

Psalm 22:1-24 Bible

Prayer: Lord Jesus, by your cry of desperate honesty, rid us of superficial faith which is afraid of the dark. Not so that we might be justified pessimists, but so that we might discover profound joy, give us, when we need it, the courage to doubt, to rage, to question, to rail against heaven until we know we are heard. We do not ask for easy answers to hard times; there are many who can offer these. We ask for a sense of solidarity, that will be enough to let us know that we do not walk or cry alone; that will enable us to go through the dark and find light again in the morning. Amen.

THE HYMN *What Wondrous Love is This?* V. 3 #223 NCH (black)

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on, and when from death I'm free, I'll sing on! And when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be, and through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on, and through eternity, I'll sing on!

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2:00 pm PRAYER SERVICE

THE LESSON John 18:28-19:16a (silence)

Psalm 71:1-18 – The Bible

THE HYMN *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross VI* #224 NCH (Black)

When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Christ of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

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The Fifth Words

I am thirsty. (John 19:28)

Scripture: *After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill 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. (John 19:28-29)*

We too thirst. We thirst for love, for friendship, for health, for success, for reconciliation with those who are estranged from us. We thirst for so many things. Mother Theresa had the words *I thirst* put on the wall next to the crosses which hung in her communities around the world. When asked about why this verse was so important to her, Mother Theresa responded that the words, *I thirst*, reminded her that as much as human beings thirst, God also thirsts for us. God thirsts for each member of this frail human family because each one of us is beloved. Her belief in this kind of love sustained Mother Theresa in her work with the most unwanted, unloved among the human family. Mother Theresa became living waters for those in need, even as she brought literal water to quench the thirst of those she served.

Let us sit together in quiet now that we might reflect on our thirst. For what do we truly thirst and where we might find what Jesus referred to as “living waters” to quench that thirst? How could we become people who offer living water to those who may have great need of it?*1

Prayer: Merciful God, you have made us for yourself. We know it, even if we cannot name it. We have had these bodies and these minds long enough to learn to live with our limitations. Yet despite this, something in us hankers, yearns, thirsts for something better, something greater which we know is there. We sense the disappointment in dashed hopes that deserve to be fulfilled, in missed opportunities which should have led to joy not frustration, in people whose potential has been buried or denied and deserves to flourish. So much of life demands resolution. So thank you for this incompleteness, thank you for this yearning, thank you for this thirst. Thank you for giving us enough of you to want more, and so to sense the fullness of eternity within the limits of time. Amen.*2

THE HYMN *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross V3* #224 NCH (Black)

From sacred head, from hands and feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down! Did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?

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The Sixth Words

***It is finished.* (John 19:30)**

Scripture: *When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished."*
(John 19:30)

Mary Oliver writes:

Doesn't everything die at last and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

Let's sit in quiet now and reflect upon this one wild and precious life that we have been given. What do we most need to do, most yearn to do with the time we have left to us? Life is fragile. None of us know how much time we have. What words do we want to make sure we say? What acts of love and kindness need to be completed? *1

Prayer: Now, Lord Jesus, you can let go of us. You have convinced us of our sin and you have forgiven it. You have convinced us of your way and have engaged us on it. You have shown us a foretaste of heaven and have made us part of its glory. You can let go of us now. Having overcome the sin of the world, death will be a small obstacle. As the end comes, dear Savior, we will watch with you. *2

THE HYMN *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross V.4* #224 NCH (Black)

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small; love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

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3:00 pm PRAYER SERVICE

We hear the final words of Jesus as he surrenders to death:

The Seventh Words

Into your hands I commend my spirit. (Luke 23:46)

. . . darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." (Luke 23:44-47)

And in the end, do we not commend our spirits into one another's hands? Do we not give ourselves into one another's keeping? Dennis Brutus writes, "Somehow we survive and tenderness does not wither." That we are here at all relatively sane and sound is due to the care of others. Let us sit in quiet and reflect on tenderness. Let us give thanks for the tenderness that we have received, for the hands who have received and kept our bodies and spirits and for the opportunity to pass that tenderness along to others.*1

Prayer: Go, silent friend, your life has found its ending. To dust returns your weary mortal frame. God, who before birth called you into being, now calls you back. Lord Jesus, we let you go. So go to heaven, where you will welcome and live with those whose death, with your death, we remember. Tell them we love them, that we miss them, that they are not forgotten.

And cheered by the prospect of a day when there will be no more death or parting, and all shall be well, and all shall be one, may they who have died before us be among the first to welcome us to heaven where, with you enthroned in glory, we will share the everlasting feast of God's family. Till then, keep us in faith, fill us with hope, deepen us through love, to the glory of your holy name. Amen. *2

THE HYMN *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded* verses 1,3

O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down, now scornfully surrounded with thorns, your only crown, how pale you are with anguish, with sore abuse and scorn! How does your visage languish which once was bright as morn!

What language shall I borrow to thank you, dearest friend; for this your dying sorrow, your pity without end? May I be yours forever; and though my days be few, O Savior, let me never, outlive my love for you!

Medieval Latin attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153), German paraphrase by Paul Gerhardt, 1656; translation James W. Alexander, 1830, tune melody by Has Leo Hassler, 1601. From the New Century Hymnal, copyright © 1995 The Pilgrim Press. Permission granted for this one-time use

The Closing of our Lenten Practice

Psalm 51:10-17 The Bible

THE LESSON John 19: 17-42

We pause in silence to receive the word

THE HYMN *Were You There?* #229 *verse 1 only*

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

African-American spiritual. From the New Century Hymnal, copyright © 1995 The Pilgrim Press. Permission granted for this one-time use

The Journey, by David Whyte

Above the mountains the geese turn into the light again, painting their black silhouettes on an open sky.

Sometimes everything has to be inscribed across the heavens so you can find the one line already written inside you. Sometimes it takes a great sky to find that small, bright and indescribable wedge of freedom in your own heart.

Sometimes with the bones of the black sticks left when the fire has gone out someone has written something new in the ashes of your life.

You are not leaving
you are arriving.

This is the promise of Good Friday as it moves toward Easter morning. The Passion story does not end with death but with something new being written. Even as we extinguish these candles and enter darkness, we remember that without darkness, the light would mean nothing. What we thought was an end was also a beginning. May it ever be so.

THE TOLLING OF THE CHIME

WE LEAVE IN SILENCE

*1 Prayers adapted from a Good Friday service by Rev. Elea Kemler, First Parish Church of Groton, CT, 2007, and from work by John Gerry-Karajanes and Marisa Brown Ludwig.

*2 adapted from "Seven Words from the Cross" in *Stages on the Way* by Wild Goose Worship Group, 1998.

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