**April 1, 2021 Maundy Thursday Worship Service**

Call to Worship

Based upon the language of the *mandatum,* the command of Jesus to love one another, this service honors and commemorates and remembers a pivot point in human history. We are delighted you are here to join us.

Part of our service here this evening will include communion, so I invite you to make sure that you have with you the elements that you will need: something to eat and something to drink. And for those who are here in the sanctuary, there is a plate in the back, on the table between the doors, where you can get what you might need for communion this evening.

This is a story of human choice. We are gathered in the presence of God, who asks us to choose between life and death, between blessing and curse. We are gathered like the people of Israel, who were challenged to choose the way of life. Like them, like all humanity, too often we follow the ways of death. Yet like them, we have the freedom each day to begin anew by the grace of God. By our presence here, by your presence here, we are saying that we choose life. Let us praise the God of love and of life who has called us into this moment. Amen.

Hymn: Go to Dark Gethsemane (soloist: Angela Marseglia)

Go to dark Gethsemane,

Ye that feel the tempter's power;

Your Redeemer's conflict see;

Watch with Him one bitter hour;

Turn not from His griefs away;

Learn of Jesus Christ to pray.

Calv'ry's mournful mountain climb

There adoring at His feet,

Mark that miracle of time,

God's own sacrifice complete:

"It is finished!" Hear the cry;

Learn of Jesus Christ to die.

Prayer of Confession

...that before you gather at the table you should wash your hands, that’s probably even more important now in this time of COVID. Our way of doing that before we come to this table is to engage in a prayer of confession that washes our souls. Will you join me in that confession?

O Merciful God, tonight we take our place at table with our Christ. When he predicts betrayal, let us examine not our neighbors but ourselves. When he predicts our falling away, let us remember that the crow of the rooster is more predictable than any of us. As we contemplate his imminent arrest, let us feel not only the pain of our great loss but the shame of our tragic guilt. Then, as we anticipate his impending death, empower us to live that he shall not have died in vain.

And join me in a moment of silence to bring whatever confession may be on your soul before our God. Let us be in silent confession.

Let me take you back to the beginning of Lent, as we gathered for Ash Wednesday and marked ourselves with ashes, a reminder to us that God does not want us to live or wallow in shame and guilt, wants us to confess our sins so that we can be free of them, free to live and love as God has taught us. So God forgives your sins. God is faithful and just to remove them as far as the east is from the west. Celebrate that you are a forgiven people. And join me in the prayer that Jesus taught us.

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 debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.

Amen.

I invite you to be attentive as we hear the words of the Gospel lesson this evening.

Scripture (reader: Carole Ward)

The Scripture reading for this evening is Luke 22, verses 1 through 23.

“Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.

“Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.

“Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat.” They asked him, “Where do you want us to make preparations for it?” “Listen,” he said to them, “when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, ‘The teacher asks you, “Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?”’ He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.” So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

“When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!” Then the disciples began to ask one another which one of them could it be who would do this.”

Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper

Mary Ludey has been a friend and a colleague of mine for decades. She has been a teacher as well, in seminary and throughout my ministry. Today she posted something on Facebook that I wanna read to you as we enter this moment of our time at the Lord’s table. She wrote, “When Christians talk about communion, we say it’s a remembrance of Jesus, a memorial, which is true and scriptural. But it’s also misleading, as if what we’re doing around the table is reminiscing, like you would at a wake. But in the Gospel’s original language, the word “remembrance” is stronger, edgier: *anamnesis.* Literally, “against amnesia”. Remembering Jesus during Communion is like standing up to an adversary. It’s not reminiscence, it’s resistance. It’s not merely remembering, it’s refusing to forget.”

So I invite you to come to this table to remember, to refuse to forget, and by hearing the story again, to become a member of the story yet one more time. It doesn’t matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, this is the table prepared for Jesus. We heard the story in Scripture. It is a gift from God to you, and you are welcome at this table. Will you join with me in prayer?

Holy One, on that night, You engaged in ancient ritual, a deep and holy spiritual practice, and You transformed it. And You called upon us to remember what You did. Resisting the powers of the day that would try to rule and squelch, quiet, and silence a voice that spoke for justice and love. So in this moment, may Your holy spirit rest upon the bread and the cup, whatever it is that we are holding in our presence tonight. Rest upon it, that we might know, within the story and within the eating and drinking, that we might know what it is to have true union with You, true communion with each other, to stand on the love that resists evil. We ask in the name of the one who would sacrifice everything tonight, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So remember with me, not reminiscing, but remembering. How on that night when he gathered with his disciples in that upper room, he took the bread, he gave thanks to God, he blessed it, and he broke it. And he gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is broken for you.” As often as we eat of the bread, we do so remembering all that Jesus was and did. Take and eat.

In the same way, when the supper was ended, he took the cup and he poured it out. He gave thanks, and he blessed it, and he said, “This cup is a new covenant in my blood. As often as you drink of the cup, do so remembering me.” And so, ministering to you in His name, we offer the cup.

I invite you to join with Dave as we gather in the prayer of thanksgiving.

Dave Henkelmann: We give thanks, Almighty God. You have refreshed us at Your table by granting us the presence of Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen.

Anthem: Lamb of God (soloist: Angela Marseglia)

Your only Son, no sin to hide

But You have sent Him from Your side

To walk upon this guilty sod

And to become the Lamb of God.

Your gift of love they crucified,

They laughed and scorned Him as he died.

The humble King they named a fraud,

And sacrificed the Lamb of God.

Oh Lamb of God, Sweet lamb of God,

I love the Holy Lamb of God.

Oh wash me in His precious Blood,

My Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

I was so lost I should have died,

But You have brought me to Your side

To be led by Your staff and rod

And to be called a lamb of God.

Oh Lamb of God, Sweet lamb of God

I love the Holy Lamb of God.

Oh wash me in His precious Blood,

My Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

Oh wash me in His precious Blood,

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Reliving the Passion: A Tenebrae Service of Shadows

Reverend Don Remick: Our reading tonight is based on the work *Reliving the Passion* by Walter Wangerin, adapted for our service this evening.

Night,

A cold light falls from the indifferent stars, light like the finest of snows, pale on the ground, pale on the heads and shoulders of a sad band of people moving outside the city.

The people pause before a grove of black trees. Four separate themselves and enter the trees.

One man - listen! - is groaning. His breath comes quick as panting and is voiced like murmuring:  "Oh. God." He goes alone, now, deepest among the trees - while the other three wait, then sit against the trunks, then nod, then sleep.

That one man, totally alone, sways as though dizzy.

Suddenly he crumples to the ground. "Abba!" he cries. "Abba!" The sound is strangled in his throat, and his fingers dig like roots of the trees.

"Abba, Father, I don't want to do this. Please! You can do anything, anything. Take this cup away from me," the man cries. His voice is hoarse, a kind of barking. "Death is in that cup, more than death: damnation, separation from you, my Father. No! I don't want to do this! Sin is in that cup. If I drink it, you will not look on me. You will loathe me, and I'll despise myself! Abba, I don’t want to do this.  Take it from me - please!"

The man twists his body underneath the trees, then holds himself in a tense, unnatural posture, his face upward, his eyes shut, his breath a whistling in his nose. His whispers without even any motion; he whispers as soft as the leaves: "nevertheless...not what I want... what you want... do."

When the man returns to the three he left behind, he finds them slumped and snoring. He is alone. Even in the presence of his friends, he is utterly solitary and alone.

And so he goes and prays a second time as though he had not prayed the first. "Abba!"

And a third time, so quiet, so private the pleading now, so anguished, that his body doesn't move at all: "Abba!”

When he returns to his friends at last, he says softly, "Rise, let us be going." And this, in that hour, is what the man is doing: drinking. Drinking.

Sue Matheus:

There came an orange snake eastward through the night.

A snake of fire, a long snake of torches. Perhaps the disciples saw it and didn't understand.

Jesus did.

It wound the same path they had taken from the city to Gethsemane. It winked through the trees in its silent, sliding. serpentine approach.

It was a deadly snake.

It could kill by kissing.

The binding strength of the snake was the armed guard of the Temple and the police of the Sanhedrin. Behold: the servants of God could bite!

But the head of the snake was one of the twelve, a disciple of Jesus. Behold, an intimate could kiss for reasons other than affection and honor.

Suddenly Judas appeared in the circle of friends who stood outside Gethsemane. Smiling. Claiming his accustomed place. Holding his torch aloft to shed light on the faces around him. Looking for...no, not John or James, not Andrew, not Peter, though he greeted these with familiar nods.

Looking for...ah!

The snake coiled itself into a knot of orange in torchlight. Its scales were weapons, swords and clubs. The disciples swallowed, nervous, uncertain. Jesus gazed and waited.

The serpent struck.

Smiling, Judas said, "Rabbi!” and kissed. A sign of devotion. A sign for the guard, that this was the one to seize and lead away.

A lie.

In a garden, once, the Lord God decreed between the serpent and the seed of the woman enmity to the death.

In a garden again that enmity produced this pathetic assault: a kiss that could kill.

Wendy Walsh:

Through the streets of Jerusalem at night, silently, Jesus walks bound among the guard.  his mouth is closed. He says nothing. There's motion in the courtyard of the High Priest's house.  People have gathered, faces washed in orange and shadow: firelight. They stare as Jesus is ushered past them to an outdoor staircase. He ascends the steps, saying nothing.

An upper room jumps with oil-light, tongues of trembling fire. Jesus enters. Men hasten to their seats, more grim than dignified. They are a quorum; that's what matters. They represent the whole Sanhedrin. Jesus places the horns of a semi-circle, embraced, as it were, by his enemies - but solitary, saying nothing.

Caiaphas - politic, smooth, long-tenured, shrewd - faces him.

The trial begins.

One by one men enter and testify against the figure in the middle. But one by one their witness visibly irritates the High Priest. Their words do not agree; the evidence is inadmissible. But Caiaphas knows precisely the verdict which he wants and which the incompetent witnesses are frustrating: death.

The High Priest’s anger runs through the room. Sandals shuffle. Faces grow strained.  The air tightens. But Jesus stands immobile, silent, gazing at Caiaphas.

"He threatened to destroy the temple," one man testifies. "I heard him."

"When?" asks the High Priest.

"Just a few days ago," answers the man.

"Well, not exactly," says another man. "I think it was three years ago."

BOOM! The High Priest hits his bench, dismisses the fools, rises and takes the floor to himself. To Jesus directly he hisses, "Have you nothing to say for yourself?"

But Jesus keeps his mouth closed, keeps gazing at Caiaphas. No, nothing to say. Full of frustration, then, with withering scorn, the High Priest sneers, "What? What? Are you the Messiah, then?"

A murmur, nearly a giggle, passes through the room.

But the mute man speaks, and what he says causes a nervous silence: "I am."

For an instant, the High Priest freezes.

Then with a ghastly mixture of horror and hilarity, he explodes. He rips his clothes and cries,  "Oh! Blasphemy! Blasphemy!" He whirls to the council and demands, "What is your verdict?"

The council is beaming. The whole room is relieved. Evidently, the High Priest is more happy than horrified, for the thing is done and well done after all.

"Death!" sings the council.

And those who had stood uncertain along the walls move forward with sudden certainty and brutal assurance. They spit on Jesus, proof of their power and new-found confidence. They blindfold him, and hit him, and  - proving how little they hear his powers - scornfully ask him to prophesy:  "Who hit you?"

A gray dawn is sifting through the windows.

Through all the frolic, Jesus keeps his mouth closed.

He says nothing more.

Nothing at all.

Carla Provost:

They changed the charge. This was probably the result of the council's morning consultation.  They needed a charge that Pilate would admit was a transgression of the Roman code. "Blasphemy" was meaningless to those who didn't honor the God of the Jews. Besides, Pilate had shown nothing but contempt for the people of his province, and internal squabbles would be dismissed with a sneer.

But they needed Pilate's attention because they needed Pilate's decree: the death sentence was jealously guarded as the right of Rome alone. Pilate was to pronounce it.

Therefore, they changed the charge against Jesus, but kept the charge a capital offense. High treason, this time. Sedition. "He wants to make himself a king of the Jews." To the governor from Rome that would mean, "he is a leader of the resistance against the empire." But even then the verdict wasn't assured.

The proceedings opened with the indictment by the plaintiff, in this case the officials of the Sanhedrin. There followed the examination by the imperial magistrate, Pontius Pilate. He heard testimony both from witnesses and from the accused. Usually, when this evidence had been received, he would consult with his advisors and then render a judgment, the sentence to be executed immediately.

But when Pilate questioned Jesus, the process hit a snag.

"Are you the king of the Jews?"  he asked, and Jesus gave a qualified Yes: "You have said so," implying that they each defined "king" differently.

So Pilate was forced to question the accusers again -  and suddenly he received such a blizzard of charges that the single charge of treason began to weaken.

And Jesus' resolute silence - his utterly dignified calm in the face of this frenzy - inclined Pilate in his favor. The fanatics of the province were acting fanatical again, displaying the qualities he expected and despised.

Jesus was not.

This defendant roused his wonder, and he contemplated a verdict of "Not guilty."

Mike Walsh:

Morning.

The sun stands over the eastern horizon, round, unwinding, and hot. The wind is out of the northwest, but comes uncertainly and seems, at times, to turn back on itself. Little clouds like little hands are rising in the west.  Jerusalem is near the end of the rainy season. It might, but it might not, rain today.

The sun is solid: but other elements of the heavens are troubled and unpredictable. Beasts stamp their hooves and shiver their nervous hides. They twist their ears to a distant roaring.  Thunder? The onset of a storm,? No, no: human voices. A roaring mob on the pavement before the Praetorium, demanding its will of the Governor.

Humanity, making a choice.

Pontius Pilate stands before the crowd, nonplussed. He wanted to ease their antagonisms by offering an amnesty. They've chosen Barabbas. Have they, then, satisfied themselves regarding Jesus?

Pilate asks them a question which tests their mood and his success (although it's a sarcastic question): "Well, then. What shall I do with the fellow you call King of the Jews?"

This is the timeless choice of humankind!

Their answer comes back with shocking savagery, and the beasts of Jerusalem think they hear thunder.

Jesus stands silent and solitary on a porch above the people, regarding their riotous actions, hearing the horrible words they yell.

"Why?" cries Pilate, bewildered by this fury. "What evil has he done?"

But we are at the climax of human hatreds, now. This rage requires no rationale. This hatred has no reason but itself. Therefore, treasons and blasphemies and charges are all forgotten now. No evil that Jesus has done is answered Pilate. No answer at all is given his question.

"Why?" cries Pilate. And the rage redoubles itself - that's all. The storm increases. That single word, the death sentence, is merely repeated: no proof, no premise, no logic to support it; for this is the natural reaction of a sinful people in the presence of their God; and its passion alone is its validity:

Crucify! Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!...

Dave Henkelmann:

And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the praetorium).

“You have heard it said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’.

But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil.”

And they called together the whole battalion, auxiliary troops recruited from the non-Jewish people of Palestine.

"Ah, recreation!"  they cried.

“If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek as well.”

Jesus had already been scourged with the whip. They clothed his bleeding shoulders: in a purple cloak, perhaps the mantle of a Roman soldier. They wove a crown of thorns from a nearby shrub and stuck it on his head.

You have heard it said,

"You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy."

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

And they began to salute him in raucous mockery, hooting, "Hail the King of the Jews!"

For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?

And if you salute your friends alone, what more are you doing than others?

Even sinners do the same.

And they struck his head with a reed, their scurrilous sign of a scepter.

Judge not, and be not judged, and you will not be condemned.

And they knelt down in smirking homage before him.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

And when then they mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you

and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven,

for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

And they led him out to crucify him.

(sound of nails being hammered)

Reverend Don Remick:

These are the things I see:

I see the soldiers relaxing on a low hill. They haunch over the wretched benefits of the morning's assignment: they get the possessions of those they crucify. They're casting lots for an undergarment, a robe, a belt, sandals. They're passing time. A centurion notices the coming thunderhead of clouds.

Above the soldiers, but beneath the sun and colliding with the sky hang three men, each of them stripped to a loincloth: a robber, a robber, and you.

And this is what I see:

A wooden board is nailed to the wood above your head, chalk-white and burned with the indictment, "The King of the Jews." I say, Yes! In my soul I shriek it: Yes! But I keep my face impassive for fear of the soldiers. Yes! This is what we've always called the Messiah! King of the Jews! The Roman joke is right. You are, I whisper - but at once the outrageous joy I feel begins to fade. It doesn't fit what I'm seeing. My mind rebels: how can this be? Oh Jesus, forgive me. I've never imagined the King to be so broken. Jesus, Jesus, you grieve me, you confuse me -

This is what I see:

Your knees are bent. They angle sideways. Your hands cup blossoms of blood. Your shoulder joints are separating, your muscles are drawn like cords, your ribcage is breaking through the flesh. How do you breathe? Can you breathe? Your weight constricts your lungs.  Your body weight is suffocating you.

Breathe! Jesus, breathe!

Make fists. Lift yourself up on the spikes.

Open your mouth and gulp the air.

No! - don't do that with your eyes.

Don't look at me.

It does no good to look at me!

I can't stand it if you look at me - not now.

Fight for your own life a little longer, Jesus.

Breathe!

Henry Cooke IV:

At noon the rolling armies of the sky attack.

All morning the sun has been ascending, rising in round solitude, with perfect obedience, toward its highest point; and the day has grown the hotter. All morning a hemisphere of cloud has been closing the westward heaven. Nervous livestock, a nervous centurion saw the mass approaching.

Suddenly, at noon, at the sun's high glory, the clouds attack. The light is shut away. Blackness. The earth is cast into a wrathful darkness. The storm breaks. Thunder rumbles in the blackness. "On that day," the Lord has warned, "I'll make the sun go down at noon. I’ll darken the earth at daylight! I will make it like mourning for an only son!"

The storm has a voice of immortal scorn. Human mockery is nothing beneath it. The land is frightened into silence. Nobody talks. No one reviles another. Not for this hour nor the next. For a full three hours the storm roars on, incriminating those who wore the image of God.

But at the end of the third hour another voice is raised.

"Eloi! Eloi!" howls the voice. Jesus!

This is the central figure on the crosses:

"Lama Sabach Thani?"

And suddenly the very focus of the storm has been revealed - the one who is in the most abysmal darkness, alone.

"My God! My God, why have you forsaken me?"

No man nor any woman on earth is suffering this convulsion of the elements as Jesus is. None is required to. He who has become hateful in our own eyes is hateful likewise to the God of Heaven. He is the one whom Heaven is shut against.

Listen! Listen: does Heaven answer him? Ah, God - no! The darkness for humanity is for Christ an absolute void. There is between the Father and the Son, a gulf and cosmic separation.  though the Son still loves the Father, the Father despises the Son; for he sees in him the sum of the disobedience of humankind. This is a mystery, that Christ could be righteousness and sin, but in this moment it is also a fact - and the fact must seem to last forever.

This, precisely, is his bitterest suffering of all: right now, crying down eternity unheard, divorced completely from the Father he cannot help but love, Jesus is suffering our hell. The darkness that swallows Jerusalem this day - it is no less than the damnation of the Messiah.

Marjie DiSalvio:

And it happens as it was written of him. According to the Scriptures, according to his own predictions, according to the will of God.

The cup is drained to the bottom and dry.

The death, when it comes, is not according to human expectation.

It is a wondrous thing, an astonishment.

Jesus lifts up his face to black heaven and utter a stunning cry, a shout that snaps the centurion to attention: a cry of triumph!

He does not subside into groaning unconsciousness. He does not spend hours whimpering and pleading. He dies, in fact, swiftly, fully conscious to the end, in his own time.  And at the end the sound he makes is no death rattle, but the sort of shout a warrior sends up when the battle is done and won!

Victory, O ye nations of the earth!

The suffering is over, the sacrifice complete, and the profounder truth of his defeat - as true a defeat as it was - is given sudden expression: Satan, thou art defeated in my defeat! Sin, thou art dispossessed of a people! Death, look about thee; thou art mighty and dreadful no more. Behold, I close my eyes; at my own choosing. I breathe my last and thou art not.

He dies. He truly dies. He dies the death for us all.

It is no coma, no deeper sleep than another sleep. It is the final fact of his mortality and of our disobedience.

He dies. But he dies the death of death as well.

He cracks the wall that divided us from God - a breach so universally significant that it has its material sign in the temple:

Jesus shouts; the storm goes forth once more that afternoon;

and the veil is rent in twain.

Solo: “Were You There?” (soloist: Angela Marseglia)

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?

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?

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?