

Prelude: [Annie Schulz]

Gathering Thoughts, Call to Worship & Prayer: [Doug Schulz]

I welcome you to this Good Friday service. For the second year in a row, our way of reflecting on this sorrowful but not hopeless day of remembering the death of Jesus is affected by the lingering global COVID pandemic. We are so grateful for the work of our musicians and leaders and sound and internet technicians in preparing and distributing this service, and, above all, grateful for the gift of God's grace that we solemnly recognize and receive today in our practice of a Communion service as part of our worship this morning.

Our Lenten theme of "Wilderness Calls to Deep Faith" culminates in the ultimate wilderness experience of this day with its acknowledgement of the difficult reality of human behaviours we call "sin" that stand in the face of God's image and nature, abusing grace and disfiguring or denying the truth of God's absolute love. David Brubacher will be sharing a Scriptural reflection on the theme of how God's love is relentless in spite of our sometimes resistance, as we are welcomed with full hospitality into God's gracious presence always. Recognizing this grace in Jesus, we can face our troubles, and be empowered to reach out to others with love.

Call to Worship:

O, let us come people, come with our hearts wide open to God's welcome. Let us approach the mystery and wonder of grace today, not with fear but with a full surrender of our souls to be loved so completely. And with a far-reaching willingness to share the love of God within the world we live in, as best we can. May today be a remembrance of the old, old story; and may it be a refreshment in the newness of daily obedience, daily embracing of the way of Jesus given as gift to one and all.

Prayer:

O, God our Creator and our Restorer, we come to you humbled by your amazing love in the face of our sometimes resistance and of this world's too often arrogant rejection or your graceful way. Move us to see the Truth of eternal, universal Love in fresh light today, and empower us to receive with gratitude again and again the gifts of forgiveness and correction as well as of inspiration and direction so that we can stand strong in faith, even in the hardest times. And so that we can step forward, at every age and stage of life, confident in your presence within us as persons, and among us as a people, seeking to boldly know – and gladly show - your Love. Amen

them. 19 Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth,[b] the King of the Jews.” 20 Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew,[c] in Latin, and in Greek. 21 Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” 22 Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

“When I Survey” (HWB 259, v1)

[Women’s Group]

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

“Oh, the wonderful cross” (Voices Together #324)

*Oh, the wonderful cross, oh, the wonderful cross bids me come and die
and find that I may truly live.*

*Oh, the wonderful cross, oh, the wonderful cross; all who gather here by grace
draw near and bless your name.*

“When I Survey” (HWB 260, vv. 2,3,4)

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them through his blood.*

*See, from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an off’ring far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.*

John 19:28-34

[Doug S]

28 After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” 29 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. 30 When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

31 Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews 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. 32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. 33 But when they came to Jesus and

saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.

Women's Group: "Stay with Me" [VT #319]

Stay with me, the night has come, and soon it will be morning.

Reflection: "Deep Faith: Welcome and Hospitality" [David Brubacher]

Good Friday is often seen as the darkest day in the Christian year. And with good reason. It is the day we observe the crucifixion of Jesus as the cruel form of death it was. But as Christians, we are Easter people who know the story ends with Jesus' resurrection, the means of our salvation and eternal hope. But I wonder if sometimes we gloss over the depth of Jesus' suffering. Perhaps, because we know how the story ends, but also because we know it so well that it has become a routine observation.

History is filled with dark periods. For many, my age and younger, this past year has been the darkest period in our memories. The pandemic and the racial divide we are experiencing has shattered the sense of security we have lived with for most of our lives. Still, the scriptures speak of another story, the story of God's presence within the adversities of human life.

During the season of Lent, I have been particularly drawn to the drama of God's presence in the ups and downs of life. In both the weekly and daily lectionary readings, God's presence is woven through the course of history; sometimes saving miraculously, other times speaking judgement, but most often, providing guidance and strength in the face of life's struggles.

Our Lenten theme, "Wilderness Calls to Deep Faith," also guided my reflections. At the beginning of Lent, I found myself asking, "What is deep faith and what does it do?" About halfway into Lent I concluded, "Deep faith embraces the presence of God with gratitude and draws strength to face the realities of life." Today, on this dark day, we turn to the scriptures to guide us on our journey.

Join me in prayer. Holy God, we are grateful for the opportunity to be gathered in this way, on this day. As we approach the scriptures - your word for us - empower us by the Holy Spirit that we might hear the word you have for us today. Amen.

It was William Shakespeare who said, "All the world's a stage." Now I'm going to stop right here in pretending I know anything more about Shakespeare in light of having three English teachers in our midst. But I am struck by the image of the world as a stage on which the drama of life unfolds. So, it is with that image in mind that I ask, "What is deep faith?"

If you had told me a year ago that I was going see very little of our family, that I would not connect much with friends, that apart from time with Lynda, I would spend a lot of time alone, I think I would have said, "I can't do that! I won't survive!" But here we are, somehow by the grace of God, I and we, have survived. Some of us may even have thrived. I would offer, this is because of the drama of God's presence that is playing out in human life.

Today, Good Friday, we stand at a critical point in that drama. It is a tragic point. At the same time, it is filled with powerful seeds of hope for a new and better relationship with God, with others and with the world in which we live. All because Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, "Not my will, but your will be done!"

The drama played out in the crucifixion and suffering of Jesus has deep roots in the larger drama of God's saving actions in history. The words from Isaiah 53, "He was despised and rejected by others, ... But he was wounded for our transgressions ...," has long been understood in Christian tradition as a prophecy of the suffering and death of Jesus for the sake of our sins. Its not entirely clear that is what the prophet Isaiah intended at the time. It is clear, however, that in the difficulties of the day, there was a deep longing for God's presence to be experienced in a new and life-giving way. From within the suffering of God's people there came an expectation that a servant of God would come to take the suffering of the people upon himself. From what we know today, it is easy to see Jesus as that suffering servant.

What was read from John's gospel today is but a snippet of chapters 18 and 19 that narrate the gruesome drama of Jesus betrayal by Judas, arrest, trial, sentencing, rejection by the crowd, crucifixion, and burial. I pick up the drama after Pilate sentenced Jesus to die and had him flogged then handed him back to the religious authorities with the words, "Here is the man." In Latin, "Ecce homo."

Throughout the arrest and trial Jesus is presented as innocent of any wrongdoing. In carrying out his mandate to seek justice for all, he is condemned by those who are more interested in preserving their own place of authority. Still Jesus remains true to his prayer in Gethsemane.

We might also feel like Jesus. We are innocent. We did not ask for this pandemic. It can also be said, racial minorities did not ask for discrimination, even death. Still Jesus took on the suffering due to our sin and short coming so that there might be a better world.

After Jesus was handed over to the religious leaders, the crowd began to cheer and shout, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Quite likely these were some of the same people who only days earlier shouted, "Hosannah," as Jesus rode into Jerusalem. It does not take much imagination to see the danger that exists in allowing oneself to be swayed by rhetoric that calls for the destruction of any

person, place, or thing. Still Jesus remained true to his prayer, “Not my will but your will be done.”

As the drama unfolds, Jesus knows the cross is his destiny. He also knows that he has the power to call for divine intervention to save himself. But he chooses not to do what was within his power. Do we see the irony in this? Jesus gives up his own power and chooses to die at the hands of those seeking to exercise their own self-serving power over him. And so, Jesus died an agonizing death, condemned to die between two common criminals. Why? Essentially so that you and I could be saved from our own self-serving exercise of power and sin. Still Jesus remained true to his prayer.

Throughout this drama, Jesus exercises deep faith and demonstrates its outcome. Deep faith for Jesus went beyond saving himself to doing what was best for all humanity. And here is the answer to my earlier question, “Deep faith embraces the adversities of life not only for one’s own benefit, but for the wellbeing of all.”

I return to the words of Pilate in John 19:5, “Here is the man! Ecce homo!” Today, close by where it is believed these words were spoken, stands the Ecce Homo Pilgrim House, a convent of the Sisters of Sion, committed to being a place of welcome and hospitality for all. From this place, Jesus was led to his place of crucifixion.

In July of 2004 I received the welcome and hospitality of the Ecce Homo Pilgrim House as the place for our graduation from the summer study program at the Bat Kol Institute. But of much greater significance, is the fact that I am one who has received the welcome and hospitality of Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins. Jesus remained true to his prayer and died in my place. Because you and I have been received in the welcome and hospitality of Jesus, let us also commit ourselves to be a place of welcome and hospitality for others. Let us seek to be people who live by the integrity of our convictions rather than judging others because they do not believe as we do. Let us seek to be in right relationship with others rather than being right. Let us put people over our principles. These profound steps will take us down the road of living out the justice for which Jesus died.

With these thoughts, we prepare to come to the Lord’s Table. The elements of Communion are a profound symbol of Jesus’ suffering and death so that we might live. Let us not lose sight of that solemn reality as we participate in the Communion meal. The music this morning has been appropriately chosen to reflect the solemn nature of Good Friday. But within it we have also heard words of life, “Oh, the wonderful cross bids me come and die and find that I may truly live.”

In conclusion, I suggest this is nothing short of the way of deep faith. May we who have received the deep faithfulness of Jesus, be people of deep faith providing a place of welcome and hospitality for those we meet. To feed and strengthen us for this journey, we now turn to Jesus, "Bread of the world." Amen.

**Hymn of Response: "Bread of the world" [HWB #469]
(Beth & Annie)**

*Bread of the world in mercy broken, wine of the soul in mercy shed,
by whom the words of life were spoken, and in whose death our sins are dead:*

*Look on the heart by sorrow broken, look on the tears by sinners shed,
and be your feast to us the token that by your grace our souls are fed.*

Communion: [Beth - leader; David & Doug - servers]

...And be your feast to us the token that by your grace our souls are fed.
And be your feast to us the token - the visible and tangible representation of your goodness and affection, your endless invitation and welcome, your reconciliation and embrace - by which our souls are fed.

This morning we come to the Lord's Table where even in the midst of our solemn memorial, a feast has been prepared to feed our hungry souls. As we come to the table what is the longing of your soul? Who are you looking for? What does your heart recognize in Jesus of Nazareth?

Come, come to the table. Come in your longing and your seeking.

It is the place that we receive and are transformed.

If we are tired, weary, anxious, disoriented, confused, depressed or burnt out on life we are invited to come.

If we are joyful, thankful, full of celebration we are invited to come.

This table is our home, a place where we can receive in both the challenges and celebrations of life. It is the place where we can know comfort, encouragement, blessing and guidance even in the wilderness.

We come to this table confessing our often nearsighted and selfish tendencies, the ways we harm ourselves and others. We admit that on our own we do not have the strength required to navigate the sharp edged realities of our day to day lives. We come to receive the welcome, encompassing forgiveness, and empowerment of Christ. We come to feast on God's love and acceptance so we may in turn offer our lives as nourishment poured out as we love and serve our neighbours as ourselves.

If you are one who wants to follow this Way of Jesus, to humbly admit that this journey requires a surrender to and deep faith in Divine Grace received in both the good times and the hard times...if you want Christ to embrace and transform you, to

provide a path of reconciliation and to walk with you strengthening, renewing and holding you in Love...then come!

Come to the table.

Receive here the Love that reconciles all creation with God and one another. Come with assurance that there is no separation between God and humans and between humans and humans because the life sap flowing through everything is Love itself. In image after image Jesus imparts to his followers the assurance that they can never be cut off from that Love, because their very beings are created and rooted in it.

In this assurance, come to the table. Come to the table of Love.

Let us join together and prepare our hearts for our communion meal. The prayers we are using today are drawn and adapted from our new Voices Together hymnal and worship leader edition. Although we are not together in real time or in the same physical space, we join our spirits as one.

Communion Prayer

Most merciful Jesus,
who can be compared with you?
The supper you ordain
is a sign of love beyond measure.
As we join together at your table,
we remember your night of terror.
We remember the grief and anguish in Gethsemane,
the kiss of betrayal and the slanders against you,
the death sentence and your crucifixion.
We remember your prayer:
"Father, forgive them,
for they know not what they do."
When the criminal hanging beside you asked for grace,
you promised him life in paradise.
From your first to your last breath,
you shared in our humanity,
even the pain of death.
Yet the cross does not exhaust your love,
for with your mercy you forgive our sins,
with your resurrection you reconcile the world to God,
and with your love you meet us in the breaking of the bread
and we drink from the cup of eternal life.
Come, Jesus, our Savior,
send your Spirit;
we hunger and thirst for your promise
that the fullness of your love will save the world. Amen

We will now share the bread and cup.

At home, you may have prepared some bread and juice, perhaps wine and a cracker. Take your bread or cracker and hold it as we serve those here on the service recording team.

Among friends, gathered round a table,
Jesus took bread, and broke it, and said,
This is my body, broken for you.”

The body of Christ – We partake in the Bread of Life given for us.
(Everyone eats)

Please prepare to take your cup of juice now, hold it while we serve the musicians and speakers here.

Later Jesus took a cup of wine and said,
“This is the new relationship with God made possible because of my death.
Take it, all of you, to remember me.”

The blood of Christ – We drink the Cup of Blessing poured out for us.
(Everyone drinks)

Now we ask you, Jesus Christ:
Come with us on our journey.
Stay with us on the path of discipleship.
Strengthen us to resist sin.
Through your Holy Spirit
renew us in your likeness
and hold us with your love.
When all things are made new,
gather us with all God’s children
at the marriage Supper of the Lamb
where we shall see you face to face. Amen.

Sending Hymn: (Women’s Grp)

“Bread of Life”

[Herring/Ward]

*Bread of life run through me, fill my soul;
Bread of life run through me, make me whole.
By your stripes I am healed, by the thorns you wore;
by the pain you suffered, by the blood you poured.
Bread of life run through me, fill my soul.*

Sending Blessing:

And the table
will be wide.
And the welcome will be wide.
And the arms will open wide
to gather us in.
And our hearts
will open wide
to receive.

And we will come
as children who trust
there is enough.
And we will come
unhindered and free.
And our aching
will be met
with bread.
And our sorrow
will be met
with wine.

And we will open our hands
to the feast
without shame.
And we will turn
toward each other
without fear.
And we will taste
and know
of delight.

And we will become bread
for a hungry world.
And we will become drink
for those who thirst.
And the blessed
will become the blessing.
And everywhere
will be the feast.

Postlude