



Good Friday Prayer around the Cross

During this difficult time in our world, the somber, stark reminder of the cross stands tall for us. Jesus, in his suffering and death, reveals the very heart of God, who came to free us from sin and death, despite the cruelty and brokenness of the whole human family. In today's liturgy, we will sing a contemplative song called, "Jesus, Remember Me when You Come into Your Kingdom". If you have an ELW hymnal, it is #616. You may say the words instead of singing them if desired. Three other very beautiful hymns were selected just for this liturgy, which you may include after this portion of the worship with our music director Roxanne Litchfield Holey. Unlike usual Good Friday services, which display the stark emptiness of the church sanctuary, you may choose to light candles next to a cross in your home to symbolize your joining in this service with the saints of St. John's and all Christians who remember the sacrifice of Christ on this day of sheltering in place at home. If you are comforted by our shared ministry and can in any way support, please consider giving to St. John's via US mail or at our website: www.stjohns-ec.org. Thank you for your continued love for your church and the Gospel of Jesus as we continue to be a Fountain of Life flowing into a River of Compassion for the world. Let us begin our worship:

Opening: *(If you have multiple people in your home, you may opt to read this antiphonally)*

Almighty God, look with loving mercy on your family, **for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, to be given over to the hands of sinners, and to suffer death on the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.**

Blessed are you, O God, holy and immortal, for you remember how we are made – **as frail as dust, as fleeting as death.**

In your tender compassion, your Word became flesh and dwelt among us, that the world might know your love.

Be present with us now, we pray. Turn our hearts in trust toward you and in love toward one another, for you are gracious and merciful, slow to anger and rich in love, through Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen.

Readings: Five hundred years before Christ, Ezekiel spoke to the people of Israel about the promises of God. A reading from Ezekiel. *(pause)*

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, says our God, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you. (Ezek. 36:25-27a) Word of God. Word of Life. **Thanks be to God.**

And from the pen of Christian writer – C.S. Lewis, from his book *The Four Loves*, “To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable.”

Meditation – “*A New Heart*” Pastor Christine

At a time such as this, when the whole world has changed because of this pandemic we all now face, I have found great comfort in some of the opportunities to hear free concerts online, to watch the National Theatre from London, and even tour some of the great museums, taking in the art that normally I would never see in my lifetime. One of these is an altarpiece painting I have always wanted to see in France, but have never had the opportunity to do so – the altarpiece of the crucifixion of Jesus by Grunewald. It’s actually a rather rare vision of the death of our Lord. It was commissioned by the St. Anthony monastery in 1512. In those days, monasteries were often hospitals and the monks of this particular monastery were particularly known for their care of people who had the plague. As these sick ones would come into the sanctuary, ostracized and feared by others, these monks would tenderly take care of them.

In a desire to give spiritual comfort to these who had the plague, this altarpiece showed a rare display of Jesus in art of the day, a Jesus who on the cross also had the plague. Pitted skin and plague pocked sores are shown on his skin in this crucifixion scene, helping the ones who suffered to see that Jesus not only commiserated with their plight, he also took it upon himself. Today, perhaps we have a new appreciation for this painting by Grunewald. I wonder how Jesus would be painted on the cross today?

On this Good Friday, we have entered a new world reality – there is the hope and desire that, perhaps if we just wait long enough, that we will be able to go back to normal, whatever normal is. And, yes, this pandemic will pass hopefully sooner rather than later, and life will return to a pattern. But, as we see in the great example of the cross, there are some events that change us permanently and indeed, some events should. And, deep down, even though we want to avoid it or ignore it, we know that the new normal will not be how it was two months ago. Acknowledging the difficulties within that, the loss of control, the grief, the fear but also the hope for the future: feeling any or all those things right now are ok, and they should be honored, especially on a day when we are compelled and dare I say even say encouraged to pile them on the cross.

Dear Siblings in Christ, the heart of God is this – that in a desire to love us so deeply and to be intricately connected to all that God created, Christ came to take on our life and our lot so that he may be inextricably linked not only to our good days, but to our bad ones, to our suffering ones, to our strange ones and frustrated and tiring ones. The suffering Christ lay in a hospital bed on a ventilator. The suffering Christ struggles to breath on a cross. And, he suffers for you. Indeed, on this day of all days, we not only remind ourselves of our own part in the story of the cross, but we remind ourselves of Christ’s part in it, so that the heart of God may be a new heart for us – a broken one, yes, but a redeemed one, too. Amen.

Prayer Around the Cross – (You are invited to sit with a cross on your table, in your lap, or have a cross sitting next to lit candles. You may place candles in sand and light them. After each petition, we will sing “Jesus, Remember Me” #616)

God of mercy, you know us better than we know ourselves, and still you love us. Wash us from all our sins, create in us clean hearts, and strengthen us by your Holy Spirit that we may proclaim your praise; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

“Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom. Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.”

Christ Jesus, in your suffering and death, you reveal the very heart of God, a heart of love, a heart that risks everything for the sake of all, even death; a heart open to the suffering of others and broken by the cruelty of others, a heart a love, love that death could not hold. We give you thanks for the cross and proclaim your praise. **Amen.**

“Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom. Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.”

Lord Christ, we come to the cross today, trusting that is where the heart of God resides. We bring our own hearts as they are – hardened or cold, broken or empty, fearful or unfaithful, trusting that God welcomes it and breathes into it the spirit of your love and sacrifice. **Amen.**

“Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom. Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom.”

Compassionate God, in the suffering love of your Son, you have shown us the way of abundant life. Keep us joined to Christ’s life-giving passion, that our hearts may know the joy and freedom for which you have created us, now and forever. **Amen.**

Finally, let us pray for all those things for which our Lord would have us ask.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Passion Reading:

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew, the 27th chapter. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

At noon the whole country was covered with darkness, which lasted for three hours. At about three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice,

'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' which means,

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

Some of the people standing there heard him and said, "He is calling for Elijah!" One of them ran up at once and took a sponge, soaked it in cheap wine, put it on the end of a stick, and tried to make him drink it. But others said, "Wait, let us see if Elijah is coming to

save him!" Jesus again gave a loud cry and breathed his last. Then the curtain hanging in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split apart, the graves broke open, and many of God's people who had died were raised to life. They left the graves, and after Jesus rose from death, they went into the Holy City, where many people saw them. When the army officer and the soldiers watching Jesus with him saw the earthquake and everything else that happened, they were terrified and said, "He really was the Son of God!" There were many women there, looking on from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee and helped him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the wife of Zebedee.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Behold the life-giving cross, on which was hung the Savior of the whole world.
Oh, come, let us worship him. *(The cross may be processed and this litany may be said 3X)*

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.
By your holy cross you have redeemed the world.