

Good Friday

Friday, April 7, 2023
Noon | Historic Sanctuary



by Jim LePage

Welcome to



PARKWAY

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

ALL ACCEPTED, NO EXCEPTIONS

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Limitless Love | Courageous Action | Spirited Inquiry

Purpose Statement

Parkway United Church of Christ strives to be an inclusive community embracing: spiritual nourishment, open-minded inquiry, courageous action, and interfaith partnerships to fulfill God's calling to create a just world for all.

Congregational Statement

Parkway United Church of Christ, with God's grace, seeks to be a congregation that includes all persons, regardless of race, ethnic, or socio-economic background while respecting differences of gender, marital status, age, sexual orientation, and mental and physical ability. We aspire to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. We invite all to share in the life and leadership, ministry, fellowship, worship, sacraments, responsibilities and blessings of participation in our open and affirming congregation.

Good Friday Prayer Service

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Meditation Upon Entering the Historic Sanctuary

Peace be to all who visit this sacred house of God sanctified by years of prayer. Pause awhile...allow the past to speak words of comfort to your soul, then add your prayer to ours before you go forth from the calm of this shelter into the busy world.

Organ Prelude

Call to Worship

One: This is Good Friday. This is real. Too real.

Many: Things don't get heavier than this.

One: While it would be rather easy to avoid it, we will not.

**Many: We are faithful to meet the darkness, fear and dread.
Yet we don't want to see the deceit, desertion, denial.**

One: This is all part of being human.

Many: God does not leave us to this work alone.

One: But partners with us so that we may have light and love—even now.

**Many: We enter into this time of Word and worry and wonder.
We also embrace the mystery and grace of this day.**

One: God brings us love all the way. *Be sure of this!*

All: Let us worship our God together—Creator, Christ and Spirit.

Opening Prayer

Holy One, we're not sure we want to be here. There are so many other things we could be doing... things that could bring us joy, set us free, help us to feel truly alive. And yet we are sure that we need to be here. You have things to say to us, things to share with us, things to show us. Help us to open all of our senses to experience you now. Amen.

Opening Hymn #98—O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

O sacred head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down;
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown;
O sacred head, what glory, what bliss till now was Thine!
Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call Thee mine.

**What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression, But Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor, vouch safe to me Thy grace.**

**What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever; and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never out live my love to Thee.**

Silence

Hebrew Scripture Lesson Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

Unison Psalter Lesson Psalm 23 (King James Version)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

New Testament Lesson Romans 8:35, 37-39

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Silence

Reflections

In the mighty name of God, In the saving name of Jesus,
In the strong name of the Spirit, We cry, we watch, we wait
We look, we long for you. ~*Celtic Prayer*

In the pain, misfortune, oppression and death of the people,
God is silent.

God is silent on the cross, in the crucified.

And this silence is God's word, God's cry.

In solidarity, God speaks the language of love. ~*Jon Sobrino, El Salvador*

The cross is the way of the lost

The cross is the staff of the lame

The cross is the strength of the weak

The cross is the hope of the hopeless

The cross is the freedom of the slave

The cross is the water of the seeds

The cross is the source for folk seeking water

The cross is the cloth of the naked ~*10th Century African Hymn*

The cross we bear precedes the crown we wear.

To be a Christian one must take up the cross,

with all its difficulties and agonizing

and tension-packed content and carry it

until that very cross leaves its marks upon us

and redeems us to that more excellent way

which comes only through suffering. ~*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

O Christ, thou didst sleep a life-giving sleep in the grave,

and didst awaken humankind from the heavy sleep of sin.

~*Byzantine Liturgy*

Christ our Lord, like the seed buried in the ground, you brought forth for

us the harvest of grace. Christ the Good Shepherd, in death you lay

hidden from the world. ~*Antiphons: Morning Prayer*

Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness. It took me years to

understand that this too, was a gift. ~*Mary Oliver*

Epistle Lesson Romans 8:26-27

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God who searches the heart, knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Gospel Lesson

The Last Words of Jesus from the Cross

Forgive them, for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34)

Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43)

Woman, behold your son: behold your mother (John 19:26-27)

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? (Matt. 27:46; Psalm 22)

I thirst (John 19:28)

It is finished (John 19:30)

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

Pastoral Prayer & Prayers of the People

Lord's Prayer

Our [Creator/Mother/Father/Holy One] 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.

Hymn #92—*Beneath the Cross of Jesus*

**Beneath the cross of Jesus, I fain would take my stand,
the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land;
A home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way,
From the burning of the noontide heat,
And the burden of the day.**

**Upon that cross of Jesus mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One who suffered there for me;
And from my stricken heart with tears, Two wonders I confess:
The wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness.**

**I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of his face;
Content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss,
My sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross.**

Silence

Reflection *The Way of Pain*—Wendell Berry

For parents, the only way
is hard. We who give life
give pain. There is no help.
Yet we who give pain
give love; by pain we learn
the extremity of love.

I read of Abraham's sacrifice
the Voice required of him,
so that he led to the altar
and the knife his only son.
The beloved life was spared
that time, but not the pain.
It was the pain that was required.

I read of Christ crucified,
the only begotten Son
sacrificed to flesh and time
and all our woe.

He died and rose, but who does not tremble
for his pain, his loneliness,
and the darkness of the sixth hour?
Unless we grieve like Mary
at His grave, giving Him up
as lost, no Easter morning comes.

And then I slept, and dreamed
the life of my only son
was required of me, and I
must bring him to the edge
of pain, not knowing why.
I woke, and yet that pain was true.
It brought his life to the full in me. I bore him
suffering, with love like the sun, too bright, unsparing, whole.

Silence

The Stations of the Cross with Questions Jim Burklo **Via Dolorosa — Via Crucis — Way of the Cross**

1. *Jesus is condemned to death*

Whom do you blame for the ways in which you suffer? What are the consequences of your blame and accusation? In society, who are our scapegoats? What would it be like to end this game of shame and blame?

2. *The cross is laid upon him*

What crosses do you carry through life? When have they become too heavy for you to bear? Who or what can help you bear them?

3. *His first fall*

What is the “stone” that makes you stumble and fall? What is it like to be humbled? How can your stumbling stone become the foundation of a new and better life for you and others?

4. *He meets his mother Mary*

What unfinished business do you have with your parents and/or with your children? If this was your last chance to communicate, what would you say to your parent or child?

5. *Simon of Cyrene is made to bear the cross*

What crosses are you asked to carry for others? Do you do so willingly or grudgingly? And who carries the cross for you? What do we owe the Simons of our world today – the people who labor in our fields and factories, the people who empty bedpans and mop floors?

6. *Jesus' face wiped by Veronica* (medieval legend not in the Bible.)

When you look in the mirror, do you see the true image of the Christ? Do you see the suffering of the Christ, and also the one for whom the Christ is willing to suffer? When have you witnessed the true image of the Christ in other people?

7. His second fall

What hurts have you experienced, both physically and emotionally, that leave you more vulnerable to more hurt? Have you chosen to hide or excessively protect yourself from further suffering, or have you chosen to keep on living and loving, and risk being hurt again?

8. He meets the women of Jerusalem

What is your place in history? How do you, and how can you, make a difference in the unfolding of human destiny? What is your part in preventing catastrophic climate change, and in advancing economic, social, and racial justice?

9. His third fall

What have you lost along life's way? In what way are you cursed by these losses, and in what ways are you liberated? If you could have anything back that you have lost, what would it be, and what would you do with it if you had that second chance? What do you have to lose now — dignity, pride, position — and what would it be like to lose it?

10. He is stripped of his garments

What part of your life do you want to keep “under cover”? When have you been painfully exposed? In what ways have you made light, downplayed, or disrespected the sufferings of others?

11. He is crucified

What ideas or definitions or theologies about God have you forsaken, or have forsaken you? What experience or understanding of God has taken their place?

12. He dies on the cross

What part of you is dying? What part of you has died? In what ways will you never be the same? Do you embrace this change, or regret it?

13. His body is taken down from the cross

When have you been served profoundly by people who have helped you in secret, with no thought of reward or even thanks? What thankless, hard tasks are you asked to do for the sake of others? Are you willing to do them without recognition or reward? When is it appropriate to expect thanks and reward for your good work, and when does public acknowledgement just get in the way of being of service?

14. His body is laid in the tomb

What part of your life is entombed -- on hold, unseen? What kind of “gestation” or transformation is underway within? What new life might await you when the stone is rolled away from your tomb?

Silence

PG-13 Reflection *Goddamn Evil*—David Henson

Goddamn abuse
Goddamn injustice, slavery and rape.
Goddamn racism
Goddamn war
Goddamn that strange fruit of bigotry and hate
Goddamn suffering
Goddamn hunger
Goddamn indifference, apathy and waste
Goddamn noose
Goddamn death
Goddamn despair, depression, the wait
Goddamn Good Friday
And a Goddamn cross
Goddamned it all,
Goddamned it too late
Yet we live like it's Easter
Like God has been raised
We live like it's light,
In spite of the dark.
We live like there's joy
With spite in our hearts
For all that remain of our Goddamned days
These Goddamned Good Fridays.

Silence

Reflection *Little Crucifixions*—Bruce Epperly

On Good Friday, we can ponder all the little crucifixions going on right now in our world, often unnoticed, but very real – death dealing actions that lead to melting polar icecaps, global climate change and the potential cataclysm that awaits our children and children's children, complacency at mass starvation and genocide, apathy at sex trafficking and human slavery, our addiction to oil and gun ownership, and the list goes on, even before we explore our own personal ambiguities and culpability in the subtle violence of everyday life.

Reflection *Good Friday's Cross*—Unknown

Good Friday's cross stood on the altar
skeleton shrouded in black, anonymous as anaesthetized death—
as if we could not face dying, pain, blood,
but wished their annihilation behind unseeing veil
and choir's harmonizing of the torn body and spilt blood
of the One whose life is sign and symbol
of all the calculated obscenities people endure
in the name of God or of anyone else for that matter.

Organ Reflection

Reflection *Good Friday*—Christina Rossetti

Am I a stone, and not a sheep,
That I can stand, O Christ, beneath Thy cross,
To number drop by drop Thy blood's slow loss,
And yet not weep?

Not so those women loved
Who with exceeding grief lamented Thee;
Not so fallen Peter weeping bitterly;
Not so the thief was moved;

Not so the Sun and Moon
Which hid their faces in a starless sky,
A horror of great darkness at broad noon –
I, only I.

Yet give not o'er,
But seek Thy sheep, true Shepherd of the flock;
Greater than Moses, turn and look once more
And smite a rock.

Silence

Reflection *Crosses*—Unknown

Almost all the crosses I have ever seen seem much the same
despite their differing size, shape, texture—
some are empty, others bear cosmetic Christs
but few, if any, present the crosses of our world
crosses of plants and animals, under threat of extinction,
crosses of people suffering unjust imprisonment, starvation, torture,
personal and institutional violence.

Sometimes I wish I could place real bodies upon those crosses—
bodies of dead whales, dead native birds and trees,
bodies of dead, dying, emaciated and mutilated people;
for at the intersection of the horizontal and vertical elements of life
there is always a body
and in the Body of Christ I see all the bodies of this world.

Reflection *Every Time*—Unknown

Every time we gather for a meal of bread and wine we will remember. We are Christ's body. Christ is alive with us. We will continue to remember and to resist. We will show hospitality to those who are victims of imperial bullying, to the outcast, to the slave, to the stranger. We will lean on and support each other. We will remember and tell the stories of the victims. And we will dream, hope, and work for the day in which the kingdom of God, the empire of God, the empire of justice and peace will be realized on Earth.”

Reflection *Dark Outside* by Stu McGregor in New Zealand, where the season of Lent goes from fall to winter – very different from the US

It is dark outside
where the rage of humankind
is voiced by tents on fire
encircled by vultures
tweeting furiously
from armchairs far away

It is dark outside
where a plague is set free
to infect those it can
and subdue them
into unhealth
and possible death

It is dark outside
while the missiles streak
Kiev's night skies
as human remains
heap on an ambiguous
battlefront

It is dark outside
as the colonizers
tread heavily upon
illegally acquired land
in woeful and corrupt
ignorance

It is dark outside
as poverty still remains
and homelessness
rises to meet
the dawning
winter ice

It is dark outside
as withered spirits
beaten by the system
throw rocks at each other
thinking 'might makes right'
while their soul unravels
in middle-class malaise

It is dark outside
because as mere collections of
dust
we try to make wisdom
out of the nothing
from which we came
and to which one day
we will return

It is dark outside
even as a distant light
shimmers on the wasteland
for those who seek ruach
the divine wind that fills us
with the very breath of God

Silence

Reflection

The Bible commands us to take care of the unfortunate and defend those who are oppressed. This is a very real and profoundly important part of what it means to live out our Christian faith. However, the core message of Christianity—the gospel—is that Jesus died for our sins, was buried and resurrected, and thereby reconciled us to God. This is the message that will truly bring freedom to the oppressed.

Many Christians find the concept of God willing Jesus to die on the cross to be embarrassing or even appalling. Sometimes referred to as “cosmic child abuse,” the idea of blood atonement is de-emphasized or denied altogether, with social justice and good works enthroned in its place.

Some Questions to Ponder

A great number of people keep silent most of today. What role does silence play in your life and in the life of your spirit?

Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. When has money been a complicated arena for you and how might your relationship with money changed over time?

Peter, frightened by the forces aligned against Jesus, denied him three times. When have you denied God? Where do you find courage not to?

There is so much judgment in this story. There is so much judgment in the world today. Whom do you judge? How and why? Where do you feel judged? What can you do about it?

It is said that the Spirit helps us in our weakness and when we are unsure of our prayers, the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. Try it—sigh deeply. Sigh again. Can you feel the Spirit? Sigh again.

Picture the scene of the crucifixion. Where are you standing in that scene? What are you doing? What is your relationship with Jesus at this moment? When have you come away from suffering and pain? How?

In what ways is Jesus being crucified in the world still today? In what ways might you be participating in that crucifixion? How can you resist?

What do you think of these two statements? Jesus didn't die to convince God to love you. Jesus died to convince you that God already loves you.

The cross has become a symbol of freedom and God's grace and love. Who needs to experience freedom today? What role can you play in helping them find it? Make a plan. Pray for those seeking freedom and those withholding it from them.

The cross, originally an instrument of torture and execution, has also become a symbol of victory and power. What is the meaning of the cross in your life? Are you a person of the cross? How so?

They put an inscription above Jesus' head on the cross -- "King of the Jews." What terms do you use to talk about Jesus and his role in the Bible, in community and in your own life today?

What will you do the rest of this Good Friday and Holy Saturday?

What role has waiting had in your life?

How has grief impacted you in your life?

What do you think about stages of grief? How have you traversed them - denial?

anger?

bargaining?

depression?

acceptance?

Why? Bret Myers

Have you ever wondered what Jesus did to deserve being tortured and crucified to death? How could someone so good be treated so inhumanely? Some answer this in purely theological terms, but do you not wonder the real reasons why people so despised him that they did this to him? Too often we haven't thought about this latter question, and it actually gives insight to the theological answer as well.

Jesus died, if we look closely at the gospel accounts, because he was perceived as a threat to the value system of the Roman Empire and the Jewish religious hierarchy of his day. They considered him to be an insurrectionist, one who wanted to overthrow the system as it was, and had always been from one domination culture to the next.

And honestly, they were right about him...

A Version of the Lord's Prayer

Eternal Spirit: Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, Source of all that is and all that shall be, Father and Mother of us all, creation resonates with celebration of your nameless name.

Let justice and mercy flood the earth; let all creation harmonize in your imagination; let us recognize that every thought and thing belongs to you.

With the bread we need for today, feed us; in the hurts we absorb from each other and those we inflict on others, forgive us; in times of test and temptation, stand with us; from the grip of all that is evil, free us. For you alone are creating our universe, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn *Were You There?*

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

O-O-O-O, 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 cross?...

Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb?...

Departure in Silence and Peace

Peace does not always mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. Sometimes it means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart. ~*unknown*

Return tonight across the street in the new sanctuary at 7:00pm for a Good Friday worship experience different from this one. Blessings to you as we wait, watch and wonder alone and together.

A Progressive Good Friday? Bruce Epperly, UCC Pastor

What do you do with Good Friday and the Cross when you've abandoned the doctrine of substitutionary atonement and the divine necessity of Jesus' death? Like many progressive Christians, I grew up hearing the mantras "Jesus died for our sins," "Jesus died so that we might have eternal life and escape God's wrath," "Jesus paid the price for our salvation," and "sin deserves death and Jesus stood in our place."

Recently, I saw a billboard with the stable and manger and three crosses in the background, with the description "born to die." Without reflecting, many 21st century Christians, who regularly use iPods, ponder photos from the Hubble telescope, go to Sikh and Hindu doctors, and believe that humankind emerged from a multi-billion year process of evolution, assume the following:

Human sin brought death into the world.

We are born steeped in this original sin.

Human sin deserves divine punishment.

Jesus came to break our bondage to sin.

Jesus' death was foreordained and Jesus lived his adult life knowing he was going to die on the Cross.

Jesus' death is God's way of securing our salvation.

Only a divine sacrifice can free us from sin and insure eternal life, rather than eternal damnation.

The only pathway to salvation is a personal relationship with Jesus, demonstrated by an explicit affirmation of our sin and the sole salvation of Jesus Christ.

Although these "orthodoxies" may have provided assurance for us once upon a time, to many of us they no longer make sense, nor do we believe in a God who requires the death of "his" son to secure our salvation. We also see divine grace operating in other religious traditions and in the experience of faithful agnostics. Still, many of us attend Good Friday services; some of us even preach at such services, despite our theological and liturgical reservations. Can we as progressives "redeem" Good Friday in a way that affirms the interplay of divine love, human creativity, and human brokenness, while avoiding dubious theologies that assume salvation requires violence, including the predestined death of God's only Child?

We do not need to celebrate divine violence on Good Friday or any occasion, but we live in a world characterized by implicit and explicit violence against the Earth, child and adult slavery and sex trafficking, political gridlock, disparity between the wealthy and vulnerable, and political unrest. We are only too aware, when we open the doors of perception, not only of the beauty of the Earth but of our precarious situation as a result of human decision-making and the machinations of powers and principalities.

I believe that we can creatively remember Good Friday in ritual and retreat by reflecting on the interplay of our personal and institutional shortcomings and God's companionship. "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" is the quintessential Good Friday hymn. Of course, none of us were there physically. But, we are all part of an ambiguous history that persecutes prophets and promotes celebrities. On Good Friday, we can ponder all the little crucifixions going on right now in our world, often unnoticed, but very real – death dealing actions that lead to melting polar icecaps, global climate change and the potential cataclysm that awaits our children and children's children, complacency at mass starvation and genocide, apathy at sex trafficking and human slavery, our addiction to oil and gun ownership, and the list goes on, even before we explore our own personal ambiguities and culpability in the subtle violence of everyday life.

Even though Jesus' death was neither foreordained nor necessary to appease God's wrath, we can recognize that we are no better morally and spiritually than many of those who shouted for Jesus' crucifixion, stood idly by doing nothing to prevent it, and implicitly sentenced Jesus by their involvement in political and religious institutions. Are our political leaders – and we as voters – any more moral than Pilate or the Jewish religious leaders? We also operate out of self-interest and are willing for many to suffer or die for the "American way of life."

Good Friday also affirms the tragic beauty of God's relationship with the world. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from the vantage point of a prison cell, proclaims that only a suffering God can save and Alfred North Whitehead speaks of God as the fellow sufferer who understands. Throughout the centuries, Christians have debated the doctrine of patripassianism, the belief that God the Father suffers on the Cross with the Son, Jesus. While patripassianism, or divine suffering, has been labeled a heresy, based on the belief that the divine nature is incapable of suffering and that Jesus' suffering touched his humanity but left his divinity unsullied, I believe that the deeper heresy is the belief that God does not suffer with the world. A changeless, unfeeling, and apathetic God can neither heal nor save. In contrast to a passionless deity, a meaningful vision of Good Friday proclaims that God suffered – the whole of God suffered – on the cross and in every moment creaturely suffering.

Difficult as it is to admit our complacency and culpability, we can on Good Friday answer "yes" to the question, "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" We can also say "yes" to the grace that feels our pain and regret, the pain of those broken by the world's greed and complacency, and live in the hope that the one who feels also forgives and transforms, and enables us to rise up with new energies for global healing.

NOTES

Things to ponder again later and/or to share with others: