



 PARKWAY
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



www.parkwayucc.org

Friday, April 3, 2026

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.

PARKWAY UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST

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Good Friday Prayer Service

Friday, April 3, 2026 | Noon | Historic Sanctuary

Meditation Upon Entering

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:	Come, not because this is easy - but because it is true.
Many:	We come to remember, to grieve, to bear witness.
One:	This is the day when love is stretched out on a cross, when power reveals its cruelty, when justice is denied.
Many:	We do not turn away. We will not look past suffering.
One:	This is the place where the innocent are condemned, where violence masquerades as order, where the vulnerable are silenced.
Many:	We have seen this before. We see it still.
One:	And yet - even here - God does not abandon.
Many:	God is present in the pain, in the protest, in the breaking hearts.
One:	So come - with your sorrow, your anger, your questions that have no easy answers.
Many:	Come and sit at the foot of the cross. Come and pray with open eyes. Come and stay for a while.
One:	For this is not the end of the story -
All:	But today, we honor the weight of it.

*Opening Prayer

God of the cross, we gather in the shadow of suffering. Not to rush past it, not to explain it away, but to stand here - honestly, quietly, together. This is the day when violence speaks loudly, when systems of power close ranks, when innocence is crushed and truth is mocked. And still - You are here. Not distant, not untouched, but present in the pain: in every unjust sentence, in every body broken by hatred, in every cry that goes unanswered.

On this day, we remember Jesus - not as a symbol removed from history, but as one who lived under empire, who challenged oppression, who loved without condition, and was killed for it. Help us not to look away. When the story becomes too heavy, keep us here. When we want easy answers, give us courage to sit in the questions. When we feel powerless, remind us that love, even now, has not surrendered.

God, hold all who suffer this day - those who are grieving, those who are afraid, those who are crushed by systems too big and many to name.

And hold us, too - as witnesses, as participants, as people still learning what it means to carry a cross in this world. We do not call this day 'good' because it is easy, but because love refuses to abandon us, even here. Stay with us in the darkness. Stay with us at the cross. Stay with us when hope feels far away. Amen.

***Opening Hymn** *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 God will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; God will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of the people 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 so that we might be saved.
This is the Lord for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in this 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

The Garden ~unknown

Olives breathe their bitter scent,
moonlight pools in the hollow of the Holy's hands.

A prayer trembles -
not for escape,
but for the courage to drink the cup
to its last dark drop.

The Road ~unknown

Dust clings to His feet
as if the earth itself
cannot bear to let Him go.
Crowds press in -
some with jeers,
some with tears,
all caught in the gravity of His silence.

The Wood ~unknown

The beam is rough,
its splinters whispering
of forests felled long before Rome.
Each step is a slow unmaking,
a surrender to the weight
that is more than timber.

The Hill ~unknown

Sky bruises to violet,
wind tastes of iron.
The nails sing their dull,
merciless hymn.
Even the sun averts its gaze,
and the air thickens with
the ache of creation.

The Silence ~unknown
No thunder, no trumpet -
only the stillness
after the last breath.
The veil tears,
and in the rift
a strange light gathers,
quiet as dawn
before the first bird dares to sing.

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*

Where there is no justice, there is no peace—and where there is no peace, the
cross still stands. ~*inspired by Augustine of Hippo*

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.

Reflection *Stand Under* ~Todd Jenkins

There are things
in life that we need
to understand.
Lots of them.

But there are other things,
many, if not most of which,
are far more significant
than the things
we learn to understand.

They are, for the most part,
beyond understanding.

These are the things
we need to stand under,
like a waterfall.
Faith is just such a flow.

Rather than pursue intellectual ascent,
we are invited
to let the deep mysteries
wash over us.

Sometimes, they even
wash us downstream,
to another shore,
where we need to arrive,
in order to experience
something new and necessary.

Don't get so caught up
trying to understand,
that you forget to stand under.

Gospel Lesson

The Seven 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** *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 *Good Friday* ~A. J. M. Smith

This day upon the bitter tree
Died One who had He willed
Could have dried up the wide sea
And the wind stilled.

It was about the ninth hour
He surrendered the ghost,
And His face was a fading flower
Dropping and lost.

Who then was not afraid?
Targeted, heart and eye,
Struck, as with darts, by godhead
In human agony.

For Him, who with a cry
Could shatter if He willed
The sea and earth and sky
And them rebuild,

Who chose amid the tumult
Of the lowering sky
A chivalry more difficult -
As Man to die,

What answering meed of love
Can finite flesh return
That is not all unworthy of
The Friend I mourn?

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

Reflection *Jesus and the End of Scapegoating: A Harmful Delusion*

~Richard Rohr

The human delusion seems to be this: We think someone else is always the problem, not ourselves. We tend to export our hate and evil elsewhere. In fact, this problem is so central to human nature and human history that its overcoming is at the heart of all spiritual teachings. Mature spirituality tries to keep our own feet to the fire—saying, just as the prophet Nathan did in convicting King David, “You are the one!” (2 Samuel 12:7).

Human nature always wants either to play the victim or to create victims—and both for the purposes of control. In fact, the second follows from the first.

Once we start feeling sorry for ourselves, we will soon find someone else to blame, accuse, or attack—and with impunity! It settles the dust quickly, and it takes away any immediate shame, guilt, or anxiety. In other words, it works—at least for a while. So, for untransformed people, there is no reason to stop creating victims or playing the victim.

If we read today’s news, we see the pattern has not changed. Hating, fearing, or diminishing someone else holds us together, for some reason. The creating of necessary victims is in our hardwiring. Philosopher René Girard called this “scapegoat mechanism” the central pattern for the creation and maintenance of cultures worldwide since the beginning.

It’s hard for us religious people to hear, but the most persistent violence in human history has been sacred violence, or more accurately, sacralized violence. Human beings have found a most effective way to legitimate their instinct toward fear and hatred. We imagine we are fearing and hating on behalf of something holy and noble like God, religion, truth, morality, our children, or love of country. It takes away our guilt. As a result, we can even think of ourselves as representing the moral high ground or as being responsible and prudent. It never occurs to most people that they can become what they fear and hate. It’s a well-kept secret. Without wisdom, we justify violent and even immoral actions for the sake of something honorable like “protecting the children.”

Unless scapegoating can be consciously seen and named through concrete rituals, owned mistakes, shadow work, or repentance, the pattern will usually remain unconscious and unchallenged. The Scriptures rightly call such ignorant hatred and killing “sin.” Jesus came precisely to “take away” (John 1:29) our capacity to commit it—by exposing the lie for all to see. Jesus stood as the fully innocent one who was condemned by the highest authorities of both church and state (Jerusalem and Rome), an act that should create healthy suspicion about how wrong even the highest powers can be. “He will show the world how wrong it was about sin, about who was really in the right, and about true judgment” (John 16:8).

Silence

Reflection *Good Friday* ~Andrea Skevington

We don't know what we do,
from the careless word that
starts a fire of anger,
to the careless killing
of a butterfly -
who knows what
wide effects,
what winds and rains,
begin and end with just one death?
We walk in darkness, so often,
and so often, we close our eyes,
we do not wish to know.
And Jesus, seeing this,
that his life would end
with angry shouts,
with fearful washing of hands,
with indifferent playing of dice,
Knowing all this, even so, he bore
our lawful unthinking violence,
our blundering disregard for consequences.
Another would pay for our actions.
Yet as the ripple of our acts flows out,
through the world, who knows where,
so too, now, flows forgiveness,
following on, spreading and transforming,
watering dry ground, lifting burdens
and carrying them away.

Reflection *Requiem* ~Elizabeth Jennings

It is the ritual not the fact
That brings a held emotion to
Its breaking-point.
This man I knew
Only a little, by his death
Shows me a love I thought I lacked
And all the stirrings underneath.
It is the calm, the solemn thing,
Not the distracted mourner's cry
Or the cold place where dead things lie,
That teaches me I cannot claim
To stand aside.
These tears which sting –
Are they from sorrow or from shame?

Silence

Reflection *Good Friday Riding North* ~Jennifer Reeser

Yellow makes a play for green among
the rows of some poor farmer's field outside
the Memphis city limits' northern edge.

A DJ plays *The Day He Wore My Crown*,
not knowing it entices into tears
this woman never once disposed to travel
the holiday before.

My children squander
unleavened bread brought forth from Taco Bell.
What sacrifice of mine could be worth mention?
Enshroud it. Christ's is death enough to mourn.
Casino Aztar, Blytheville slide from view,
their souvenir and deli stations yielding
to miles of scrub-packed, newly-cultured meadow --
the man beside me rushed at the expense
of all around him.

Gripped by sentiment
at being once again in this,
the country his innocence absorbed,
he sings the songs
of artists prone to praise the great Midwest,
prodigal farms and wheat.

My eyes are burning.
An eighteen-wheeler whip has somehow managed
to drive his truck straight up a grass embankment
which rises to an overpass ahead.

It lingers there, a sacrament of chrome,
as I make peace at length with pink crape myrtles,
white baby's breath in bloom, whose counterparts
have two months past surrendered back at home.

How long were they bent down,
exhausted, jealous
for what could not be theirs, before they fell?
And did the lilies of Gethsemane
cry out with all their strength for God's relent,
or were they sweetly mute as these I see?

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 Interlude

Reflection *Mater Dolorosa* ~John Fitzpatrick

She stands, within the shadow, at the foot
Of the high tree she planted: thirty-three
Full years have sped, and such has grown to be
The stem that burgeoned forth from Jesse's root.
Spring swiftly passed and panted in pursuit
The eager summer; now she stands to see
The only fruit-time of her only tree:
And all the world is waiting for the Fruit.
Now is faith's sad fruition: this one hour
Of gathered expectation wears the crown
Of the long grief with which the years were rife;
As in her lap—a sudden autumn shower—
The earthquake with his trembling hand shakes down
The red, ripe Fruitage of the Tree of Life.

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 the 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 *The Everlasting Mercy* ~John Masefield

O Christ who holds the open gate,
O Christ who drives the furrow straight,
O Christ, the plough, O Christ, the laughter
Of holy white birds flying after,
Lo, all my heart's field red and torn,
And Thou wilt bring the young green corn
The young green corn divinely springing,
The young green corn forever singing;
And when the field is fresh and fair
Thy blessed feet shall glitter there,
And we will walk the weeded field,
And tell the golden harvest's yield,
The corn that makes the holy bread
By which the soul of man is fed,
The holy bread, the food unpriced,
Thy everlasting mercy, Christ

Silence

Reflection *At the Cross* ~Andy Stinson

I wait, And time ticks past.
I gaze, Made silent by the sight.
I watch, As soldiers meticulously move
Executing each terrible, torturous task.
I gasp, Still life lingers in His fragile, broken form.
I flinch, As blow by blow, Nails bite deep through flesh to find wood.
I stand As He is lifted high,
Silhouetted 'gainst the sky which He has made.
I weep As His cry echoes deep in my hardened, calloused heart.
I wail, As He screams 'it is complete,
Finished, final, said and done.'
I fall, As the sky turns inky black
And the sun and moon and stars forget to shine.
I kneel, As worlds collide,
And time ticks by;
What once bound, no longer seems to hold.
I bow, for part of me is gone,
Kept forever on Calvary's painful peak.
I wait, At the foot of the cross, to begin my journey home.

Reflection *Parable of the Old Man and the Young* ~Wilfred Owen

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
and builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

Silence

Reflection *Good Friday Justice* ~unknown

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?

Reflection *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?

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 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 7pm for a

Good Friday worship experience very different from this one.

Blessings to you as we wait, watch and wonder alone and together.

There may still be some individual hours to fill in our 36 Hour Easter Prayer Vigil from this evening through Easter sunrise. Please

consider checking and, if available, signing up

to carry the congregation's prayers for one hour.

Thank you.



Not Now
Mary Luti

For my life is spent with sorrow, my years with sighing. I am an object of dread to my [friends]; I have passed out of mind like one who is dead. -

Psalm 31:10-12 abridged (NRSV)

The day after the 2005 South Asian tsunami, I watched a reporter interview some survivors. In the background, a muezzin called the faithful to prayer. The reporter asked, "Are you going?" Some nodded and got up. But one man, who'd lost his entire family, shook his head. "No," he said, "not now. Now I do not have it in me to pray."

His "no" struck me as a theological necessity, a moment of accountability. To keep God out of it, at least for now, was to lay bare a truth that piety often papers over: that there are times when the very thought of God is unbearable, when there's no moment but this awful moment, when nothing exists outside this monstrous loss, when nothing is real but pain.

In such moments, convictions about God—God didn't cause this, God is with us in suffering, all will be well—matter less than the capacity to be nakedly truthful, even if it means that what once passed for faith in us is lost, and what replaces it is a permanent open-ended question.

Christians tend to overwhelm great blank spaces with hopeful assurances: we are Easter people, after all. But sometimes human suffering demands that we respect its despair and not hurry it to hope. Our haste to get Jesus off the cross and into glory may be a reason Easter is doubted by so many.

Someday that man may pray again. But the mystery of his suffering forbids us even to wonder. Not now. Now the silence, now the stripped and vacant heart.

Prayer: Save me from piety that disallows my neighbor's despair, the hasty faith that makes Easter easier to doubt. Amen.

2nd Mile Lent & Easter 2026

Heifer International heifer.org

Heifer does more than put food in the mouths of hungry people. Heifer helps people to feed themselves. The goal of every Heifer project is sustainability -- project partners achieving self-reliance. Year after year, as partner families “pass on the gift” of knowledge and one or more of their animals’ offspring to others in need, they become links in a network of hope and dignity.

Lydia’s House lydiashouse.org

Lydia’s House offers secure housing and immediate community for women and children who are victims of domestic violence. Fifty confidentially located, fully furnished apartments give families refuge, safety and support. This transitional housing is one of the largest in the country and the only program of its kind in eastern Missouri. Each family at Lydia’s House is provided an advocate to help guide them through the process of recovering from abuse. All family members are connected to support services, including individual and group resources, to help them build the skills that are necessary not only for surviving but thriving in the wake of trauma.

UP - Unleashing Potential [formerly Neighborhood Houses] upstl.org

Neighborhood Houses has loved children in St Louis and helped resilient families to be even more so since 1913.

Strengthening Resilient Families: partners with families to strengthen their core foundation with sustainable resources to build stability. Our program focuses on building bridges between schools and families and empowering families with resources, education, and support to advance social-emotional and financial well-being while enabling children to focus on learning.

After School Programs: UP provides before and after school care for kids from Atlas Elementary (charter school), all elementary schools in the University City School District, and at Immanuel UCC for the

Ferguson/Florissant School District... fun & creative activities, homework assistance, character education, cultural awareness, health & fitness focus, arts & crafts, supervised recreation, and much more!

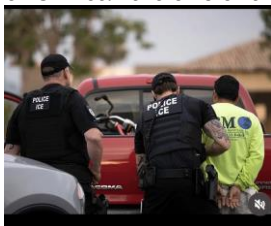
GeoQuest Program: expands access to education, hands-on learning, and skill training in geospatial technology for children in K-8 grades.

Bread for the World bread.org

We can end hunger in our time. Bread for the World is a Christian advocacy organization urging U.S. decision makers to do all they can to pursue a world without hunger. Bread’s mission is to educate and equip people to advocate for policies and programs that can help end hunger in the U.S. and around the world. Food banks are essential - and we must focus on advocacy as federal nutrition programs provide roughly 10 times as much food assistance as private churches and charities combined. With the stroke of a pen, our government leaders have the power to create policies and programs that impact millions of people at once - or to deny that care. Our faith compels us to love our neighbors near and far. We are led by the values of our faith to stand up for those experiencing hunger all over.

“Open your mouth for those who cannot speak, and for the rights of those who are left without help.”--Proverbs 31:8a

This ‘**Stations of the Cross**’ for 2026 aligns with other *stations* - a series of fourteen images depicting Jesus Christ on the day of his crucifixion. The objective is to help the faithful make spiritual pilgrimage through the Passion of Christ. It is one of the most popular devotions in Western Christianity.



1. Condemned to Death



2. Takes Up His Cross



3. Falls the First Time



4. Meets His Mother



5. Helped by Simon of Cyrene



6. Veronica Wipes Jesus' Face



7. Falls the Second Time



8. Meets the Women of Jerusalem



9. Falls the Third Time



10. Stripped of His Garments



11. Nailed to the Cross



12. Dies on the Cross



13. Taken Down from Cross



14. Laid in the Tomb