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# Not Ordinary Church

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## A Holy Week Service of Lament and Hope for Creation

Rev. Allyson Sawtell, January, 2024

*The texts of the readings and reflections will not be in the bulletin unless it is a responsive reading between Leader and People*

*Before the start of the service, have candles lit, enough for a soft lighting. Unlike a traditional Tenebrae service, these candles will not be extinguished during the service, but will remain lit throughout the service. But you will want the sanctuary to be in shadows even so.*

### Words of Introduction

We see Christ crucified in acts of violence throughout God's Creation, against God's children of all nationalities, religions, species and types.

The cry of Christ, the words of Christ's anguish, explode out of Creation's pain. Here. Now.

In these shadows of Holy Week, in this interplay of light and darkness – *both* of which can cut off our vision and make us afraid – in this interplay of light and darkness, we enter into the crucifixion of God's good world.

In this service of silence and reflection, of confession, lament, and even strangely enough, of hope, we take it in and take it on.

The grief, the uncertainty, the despair of that first Good Friday: We take it in and we take it on.

The cry of Christ is heard in the lamenting of God's children of all species and types.

As extinction threatens, as waters dry up and drought flows over the land, as wars and divisions and oppressions and hates rain down on our beloved world, we stand on the edge of despair.

And we take it in and we take it on.

We lament and witness together. We hold each other back from the edge, together.

Tonight, we sit together. And then, eventually, together we will rise.

### Scripture reading *Psalms 31:9-12*

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.

For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.

I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.

I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.

### **Song** (*pastor's choice*)

#### **Silence**

#### **Scripture Reading** Matthew 26:20-23 **Is it I, Lord?**

When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me."

#### **Reflection**

Reader 1: Is it I, Lord?

Reader 2: Surely not I, Lord?

Reader 3: The one dipping their hand in the dish with me.

Reader 4: But weren't they all doing that at some point? Aren't we all?

Reader 1: Is it I, Lord?

Reader 2: Surely not I, Lord?

Reader 4: Betrayal comes in many forms:

Reader 1: Brazen action

Reader 2: Silence

Reader 3: Succumbing to the power of greed

Reader 1: Consumerism

Reader 2: Rampant individualism with little thought for community or connectedness

Reader 3: Business as Usual in a burning world.

All Readers: Is it I, Lord?

#### **Silence**

### **Scripture Reading Luke 23: selections The Two Thieves**

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

### **Reflection**

In that horrible, deadly scene of the Crucifixion of Christ, where do we place ourselves?

On our good days, we place ourselves at the foot of the cross: grieving and loyal. And we are that. On our good days.

But admit it. On our not-so-good days, we are one of the two thieves crucified alongside Christ.

We may be the mocking one, unrepentant of the thefts they have committed. Our culture, our way of life, our ways of viewing the world, our power – have stolen:

The future from our children

The right of countless species simply to exist

Even our own sense of hope has been stolen, and our own sense of powerlessness trips us up.

Or, we may be the other thief.

On our slightly-better-than-our-not-so-good-days, we are the thief who repents. The one who wakes up to their participation in the theft. The thief who begs to be remembered by the One who embodies Love. The thief who gains new life in ways unimagined.

And on all our days, we move between and among all those possibilities: the loyalty and grief and theft and reawakening.

And we are remembered by the One who embodies Love.

And so we are never lost.

### **Silence**

**Song “Jesus, Remember Me”**

*[The congregation may sing [this Taizé piece](#) without violating copyright, as long as you do not print the words or music in the bulletin. Your song leader or worship leader may begin the piece and invite the congregation to join in. It’s meant to be sung over and over again, one simple phrase: Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom]*

**Scripture reading John 19:25b-27                      Behold your Mother**

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

**Reflection**

Behold your mother! Behold your child!

Behold each other.

Hold each other.

Tend to the grief, the brokenness. Keep each other going.

In the midst of devastation. In the midst of turmoil. In the midst of divisions and the threats of extinction of species and our future: behold each other.

Take each other in. Care for each other and lift each other up.

And draw the circle wider for those you will hold. For we are all connected in the web of life.

“Hold me!” Creation cries, our children and grandchildren of all species and types, “Hold me and I will hold you.”

Behold your mother. Behold your children.

**Silence**

**Scripture reading John 19:28                      I am Thirsty**

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty."

**Responsive Reading**

Leader: The cry of Christ is the cry of all Creation:

People: I thirst.

Leader: Rivers drying up, draining the lifeblood from communities, habitats, future generations.

People: I thirst

Leader: Toxins in our waters, poisoning the lifeblood of our communities, habitats, future generations.

People: I thirst.

Leader: Violence, hate, greed, injustice, and exclusion, draining our world of its creative life force and beauty – its future.

People: I thirst.

Leader: The cry of Christ is the cry of all Creation:

ALL: I thirst!

### **Scripture reading John 19:29-30 It is Finished**

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. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

### **Reflection**

What do you do? When "it is finished" and all seems over?

What do you do when words stop, when your heart just wants to sleep?

What happens when your will just shuts down, numb and unable to move you forward?

When change seems impossible, peace unreal, and hope a fantasy?

What do you do when it's Good Friday in your heart and spirit, and the world?

You sit in the tomb for a bit.

Because all the loss, all that you mourn, all that Creation laments, is deserving of this grief.

You simply sit in the tomb.

You will not remain in the tomb forever, for we are a resurrection people after all.

But now, this night, we sit in the tomb and mourn with God's Creation.

### **Silence**

**Song "O Sacred Head Now Wounded" verse 1**

### **Responsive Reading *Creation's Psalm: A Lament (adaption of Psalm 31:9-12)***

#### **Leader:**

From the eyes of Creation,

From the heart of Creation,

From the very bones of Creation,

Comes weeping without ceasing.  
Come cries of despair and fear and grief.

Listen!

Listen and bear witness to Creation's embodied lament:

**People:**

I am in distress.

Wasting away in soul and body.

In all that nourishes with food, water, and air: I am wasting away.

In all that nourishes with beauty and awe: I am wasting away.

My strength crumbles.

**Leader:**

I am scorned as irrelevant, as an unnecessary expense because I challenge the power of the lords of greed.

I am a horror to many as waters rise, icecaps melt, rivers run dry, crops wither, wildfires burn, war rages and hatred rules.

I am unconsidered, marginalized, unimportant, forgotten.

**People:**

I am Creation: creatures, rock, humans, air, rivers, trees.

We are Creation, and we are passing out of mind like one who is dead.

We have become like a broken vessel.

**Silence** *[with soft music playing, perhaps a quiet hymn tune, one or two verses]*

**Service of Communion**

**Call to Communion** *Candlelight in a burning world –*

Reader 1: Sometimes we want to light candles in defiance of the night.

But listen!

Reader 2: Perhaps it's not only the dark we need to defy, but also the vivid brightness of burning forests, burning neighborhoods, burning hatred.

Reader 1: Perhaps it's not only the cold darkness we need to defy, but also the bright heat of repression that suffocates choice, diversity and inclusion.

Reader 2: Perhaps it's not only the dark unknown we need to defy, but also the searing certainty of the bleaching of corals, the bleaching of histories, the erasures of people, of selves, of habitats, of species.

Reader 1: What do we hold in defiance of these things?

Reader 2: We hold a story.

We hold a story of embodied Love: of justice, of accountability, connectedness, of possibility.

Reader 1: Come, together let us gather at the Table. Together let us share this story.

*[Do Communion in your own way.]*

**Benediction**

Tonight, we sat together, in lament and silence and embodied love. And together we will rise, taking small steps towards the empty tomb where death does not hold sway but openness and possibility reign. Where a new Creation is possible. Indeed, even now new life is peeking cautiously around the corner.

Go in peace.

*[Congregation leaves in silence]*



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