

GOOD FRIDAY VIGIL – 12:00 – 3:00 pm – NHLC

(The cross is draped in black up front. A table with votive candles for lighting and another candle from which the votives may be lit.)

At the hour:

L: The peace of Christ be with us.

Blessed are you, O God, holy and immortal, for you remember how we are made – as frail as dust, as fleeting as breath. (pause) By your tender compassion, your Word became flesh and dwelt among us, that the world might know your love. (pause) 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.

Music followed by silence...

Five hundred years before Christ, God's prophet Ezekiel spoke to the people of Israel about the promises of God:

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)

L: Blessed Jesus, remove our hearts of stone. Take away the arrogance, ignorance, or apathy that keeps us from loving you, from loving your children, from loving your creation, and even from loving ourselves. By your incarnation you removed the barrier of mortal flesh separating us from God. By your suffering and death on the cross you have broken through the final barrier: death itself. Break down the walls we build to help us hold our lives together. Help us to believe that with you, there is no longer any need for walls... or for hearts of stone. (pause)

To you, O Lord, all hearts are open. Hear the pleadings of our hearts... for forgiveness... for compassion towards others... for renewal in body, mind and spirit...

Lord, give us a new heart.

Music followed by silence...

A reading from C.S. Lewis (pause)

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, irredeemable.

(pause)

A reading from Psalm 51 (pause)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit. (pause)

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.

Music followed by silence...

Jesus, in his suffering and death, reveals the very heart of God, a heart of pure unspeakable love, a heart that risks everything for the sake of love, a heart open to the *suffering* of others and broken by the *cruelty* of others; a heart alive with love that death could not hold. (pause)

Come, to the cross, to the heart of God. Bring your own heart as it is – hardened or cold, broken or empty, fearful or unfaithful, for God welcomes it and breathes into it the Spirit of Christ's love. Candles may be lit during this time of song and silence.

Compassionate God, in Christ's gentle and suffering love 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.

At the hour

L: The peace of Christ be with us.

Blessed are you, O God, holy and immortal, for you forgive our sin... heal our every illness... save us from death... enfold us with tender care... and crown us with steadfast love. (pause) We gather beneath the tree of life – the cross of Christ. We long to hear your promise to pardon, strengthen, and heal us. (pause) We come to pray for the healing of the nations... and for the healing of our own lives, families, and communities. We come at Christ's invitation; in your mercy, hear us. Amen.

Music followed by silence...

God's prophet announced the coming day when God would create a new heaven and earth... when neither the sound of weeping nor the cry of distress would be heard... when the wolf and the lamb would lie down together... and God would console the brokenhearted. (pause)

In the Revelation to John we see the day that Isaiah prophesied dawning in the crucified and risen Christ, in whom God comes to make all things new. (pause)

And Jesus himself spoke these words to Nicodemus:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” ... (pause)

Holy God, when Jesus was lifted upon the tree, he drew all things to himself. Gather us now within the arms of your mercy. As you embrace us, give us courage to reach out to others: those dear to us whom we've hurt... (pause), those whose differences from us we fear... (pause), those whom we've been taught mistrust or hate, even though they've done nothing to us. (pause) Fill us, O God, your wisdom and compassion... In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Music followed by silence...

A poem by Geoffrey Studdert-Kennedy (pause)

*When Jesus came to Golgatha, they hanged him on a tree.
They drove great nails through hands and feet and made a Calvary.
They crowned him with a crown of thorns; red were his wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days and human flesh was cheap.*

*When Jesus came to our town they simply passed him by.
They never hurt a hair of him, they only let him die;
For men had grown more tender and they would not give him pain,
They only just passed down the street and left him in the rain.*

*Still Jesus cried, "Forgive them; they know not what they do",
And still it rained the winter rain that drenched him through and through.
The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Calvary. (pause)*

Lord Jesus, we pray for the peoples of the world pleading for mercy and healing:

- those places and peoples torn by ancient animosities or terrorized by new fears... (pause)
- those devastated by drought, natural and human-caused disasters, climate change, or disease... (pause)
- those crushed by poverty, oppression, or war... (pause)
- those consumed by power, wealth, or greed... (pause)

Forgive us for the things we have done, and for the times we have stayed silent or done nothing. Give us peace in our hearts, peace in our homes, and peace in our world. Amen.

Music followed by silence...

Come, you who hunger for justice. Come feast on God's promise to feed the hungry, lift up the lowly, and set the captive free. (pause)

Come, you who thirst for mercy. Come drink from the water of life, God's power to pardon, strengthen and heal. (pause)

Come, you who long for peace among nations and between peoples, you who yearn for peace in our homes and in our hearts. (pause)

Come, all who are weary and heavy-laden. Come to the river of life. Lay down your burdens at the foot of the cross, and pour out your prayers before the throne of the Lamb of God. (pause)

Candles may be lit during this time of song and silence.

Music followed by silence...

Compassionate God, in Christ's gentle and suffering love 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.

At the hour:

L: The peace of Christ be with us.

It was the third hour – nine o'clock in the morning – when they crucified him. The day was fresh, the sun really just beginning its rise into the Jerusalem sky. After three years of public ministry, Jesus too was beginning his rise. As he cast out demons, ate with tax collectors and sinners, and pushed beyond the letter of Jewish law to the spirit of it, Jesus found few friends among the religious establishment. His charisma, his ability to draw crowds, and the authority with which he spoke made him equally unpopular with the oppressive and cruel Roman government. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him – and in that hour he took upon himself the dashed hopes and dreams of everyone who has ever dared to confront the powerful on behalf of the powerless.

The inscription over his head read, “The King of the Jews”. It was intended, perhaps, as one final piece of mockery. Everyone had a hand in making fun of Jesus – the Jewish high council, the Roman soldiers, and now even here on the cross. The inscription would prompt everyone who passed by to laugh, shake their heads, and make rude comments about him. The pile of insults and humiliation brought on by that one “label” mounted even as the sun continued to rise. And in those hours Jesus took upon himself the shame of everyone who has ever been humiliated or made fun of – from that old ark-builder Noah – to the “smart kid with the dorky glasses” who has yet to be born.

Although he was innocent of any crime, Jesus received the death penalty. The cross on which he hung was reserved for only the most terrible criminals.

Mass-murderers, child molesters, and terrorists are treated with more kindness. But without a word of protest, this One who was guilt-less took upon himself the guilt of all – from the least of us to the greatest – because he loves us all. (pause)

Blessed are you, O God, holy and immortal, Creator of the universe. (pause) You are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and full of love for the whole of creation. (pause). We praise you for your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, out of love for us and your world, took upon himself our human form. He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Forgive us when we make others a target of humiliation and scorn. Free us from our self-serving behaviors, enable us to advocate for the powerless so that all your children may live in the freedom of your perfect love, through Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen.

Music followed by silence...

Ten o'clock... eleven... as the sun rose ever higher, so did the heat. It had been twelve hours or more since Jesus had eaten the Last Supper with his disciples in the upper room; he had not slept in more than a day. Sleep-deprived and physically exhausted, each thought – each breath – became a monumental task. He was hungry and thirsty – but had no means of satisfying even these most basic of needs. And so the One who fed thousands with five loaves and two fish took upon himself the hunger and the thirst and the exhaustion of the needy.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land. The unnatural darkness at mid-day was unexpected and sudden – bringing with it confusion, anxiety and fear. You and I have known such times of darkness: a cancer diagnosis or other serious health concern... the death of a loved one or the death of an important relationship... the despair of being suddenly unemployed... a battle with addiction. Our normally well-ordered world unexpectedly becomes chaotic. We are overwhelmed and can no longer find our way. And as the darkness spread and settled over the land, Jesus took upon himself the darkness of human confusion, anxiety and fear. (pause)

God of compassion, find us in the darkness of confusion and chaos which are our frequent companions through life. Let your perfect love for us cast out all fear and anxiety. Give us your bread of life and living water always. Empower us to lift up the exhausted, give hope to the distressed, and care for the needy with respect and compassion, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Music followed by silence...

At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" With the agony of his own death reaching its climax, Jesus finally speaks. Not to condemn his attackers, not to beg for help or mercy, but in solidarity with all of humanity. In praying... crying... groaning the words of the psalmist long ago, Jesus shares the isolation and despair of anyone and everyone who has lost all hope. The inconsolable grief of parents

whose children were slain by Pharaoh... by Herod... by Hitler. The emptiness of depression that leads to suicide. The aching need in all of us to belong and to be understood, and to be loved unconditionally. The One who is so fully God – is also fully human. And so in these final, timeless words of pain and anguish Jesus took fully and completely upon himself everything – EVERYTHING – that separates us from God. Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. (pause)

God of all consolation, be near to us when our hearts are breaking. Reassure us that in Jesus your love is so full, so complete, that nothing (not even death) can separate us from you. Be present with those who grieve... those who feel abandoned or misunderstood... those who are captive to feelings of despair. Make us your messengers of hope, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Music followed by silence...

The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And we, like the centurion, are left standing at the foot of the cross, facing Jesus, wondering what it all means.

- What does it say about our own capacity for cruelty? (pause)
- What does it say about how far God – in Jesus – is willing to go to show love for you? (pause)
- What does it say about the things we may face if we truly follow Jesus?

(pause)

Now when the centurion [...] saw that in this way [Jesus] breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was God’s Son!” What are we to say?

Candles may be lit during this time of song and silence.

Music followed by silence...

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