

Holy Week | together @ home

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A Tenebrae Service for Your Home

Notes on Good Friday/Tenebrae

You may have wondered before why we call the Friday before Easter “Good” Friday, especially when that day is used to mark Jesus’ crucifixion and death? In this case, we use the word “good” in the now obsolete sense of good as “pious” or “holy.” Maybe a better name for this day would be Holy Friday, and in fact, many churches and denominations refer to it as such. So, why Good or Holy Friday, and what is a Tenebrae service?

First of all, Tenebrae is the latin word for darkness. So, this is a service of darkness, both literally and metaphorically. A Tenebrae service both commemorates and invites us into the experience of Jesus’ crucifixion and death, and we use the medium of increasing darkness as a way of drawing us further into this experience. Most often, there will be a series of candles that are lit at the beginning of the service, that are slowly extinguished as we hear more and more of the story, until finally we are left in darkness and quiet.

So, why do we celebrate Good/Holy Friday? Is it to make ourselves feel bad about Jesus dying? While that has maybe been the motivation behind such gatherings before, and you may have even participated in a service where that was told to you, we would like to invite you to set aside that guilt for this experience. Rather, we are invited into the story of Holy Friday in order to grieve the death of Jesus. But you say, “Why should we grieve, when we know Jesus rose from the dead!?!?” While we, as Christians, certainly hold that to be true, if we jump straight from Jesus’ death to resurrection, we ignore (to our detriment) the very human experience of grieving; an experience that Jesus himself had in the death of his friend Lazarus, and an experience that Jesus’ friends and family had following his death.

In many ways, our culture constantly beckons us to pass over our grief and to march furiously towards happiness - a happiness that in many ways seems to be more and more elusive. Grief is a healing mechanism for our hearts, and when we do not take the time to heal, our wounds might scar, or perhaps never heal completely. Considering our current context during the time of COVID-19, many of us have plenty of things to grieve - the loss of a sense of freedom, the loss of jobs or livelihoods, the loss of community and friendships, and even the loss of loved ones, whether to the virus or to other factors. Intentionally entering into and allowing ourselves to experience our grief is not about “feeling sad,” but about being vulnerably honest about where we’re at right now, rather than trying to pretend that we’re someplace else emotionally, mentally, or physically. Many will find this experience one of peace-giving and restfulness.

Tonight we grieve for Jesus, and with Jesus. And... we know that today is Friday, and Sunday is coming.

Instructions for Tonight's Service

You can participate in this Tenebrae service whether you are home alone, or together with your family. We would ask that you not break the stay-at-home order and invite your neighbors over, but please feel free to share these resources with friends and family and neighbors.

To start, you will need several things. If you have children in your home, this would be a great opportunity for a “treasure hunt.” Or, if that sounds a little too jolly for Holy Friday, you can invite them to help you to find all the things you need for home church tonight.

What you need:

1. **A Bible** - use your favorite translation. Alternatively, you can print off the readings attached to this document, which are from the New Revised Standard Version.
2. **Candles** - seven would be preferable, but if you can't find that many, no worries. You can always reuse one candle or only put out candles every other reading. If you don't have any candles whatsoever, feel free to either dim or turn out lights over the course of the service. Flashlights (or cellphone lights) would work too, and might be a fun way for kids to participate without risking setting your house on fire during a global pandemic.
3. **A cup** - again, no hard and fast rules here. Any cup will work, it doesn't have to be particularly ornate or special.
4. **A knife** - if you're doing this service with kids, we leave it up to your judgment. A butter knife or even a plastic knife will work. It's just a symbol. If you happen to be one of “those people,” and have a sword lying around, by all means, be literal to the text.
5. **A toy chicken, stuffed animal chicken, or other toy or stuffed bird** - Yes, you read that correctly. Please don't use live chickens, especially in conjunction with the knife. This isn't that kind of service.
6. **A bottle of hand sanitizer, soap, or a bar of soap** - realizing that hand sanitizer might be in short supply, any sort of substance or item used for washing will do here. If you're sitting on a hoard of hand sanitizer, please donate it to a hospital or care home.
7. **A scale or a balance** - A scale for weighing yourself, a cooking scale, a balance scale, be creative with this one if you need to. You could potentially make one as a craft project, using a coat hanger, string and cups.
8. **A nail or handful of nails** - again, if you're worried about kids poking themselves with these, or losing them in your carpet, feel free to substitute with something less pointy and sharp. Rope, cord, or string is an alternative here.
9. **A cross** - If you have a decorative cross or necklace that you would like to use, that works. Otherwise, here is another opportunity for a craft project with kids - popsicle sticks and glue and/or pencils and string work well.
10. **Stone(s)** - this one is pretty self-explanatory. Also, it is an excuse to get outside for a few minutes. Feel free to have everyone participating grab their own stone.

Okay, done, so what do I do with this stuff?

Find a table or flat, empty space that you could gather around. A dinner table would work fine, as well as a coffee table or counter. Please, if you are using candles, avoid lighting the candles near flammable things. If you are creating an altar for your Holy Week practice, feel free to use that altar instead. Set the candles in a line on your surface and light them at the beginning of the service. If you are using flashlights or other lights, feel free to do the same, but have them all turned on.

Each of the rest of the items that you have found/scavenged/hunted for correspond to a specific reading in the story for tonight. There are eight (8) readings in total, and therefore there are eight different items. The service opens with a prayer, and then it follows the same rhythm for every reading, **with the exception of the final reading.**

Step 1 - Read the text/story (either from the printed readings that we have provided, or from your favorite translation).

Step 2 - Set the item corresponding to that reading in front of the candle/flashlight on your “altar.” *If you are doing this service with children, feel free to pass the item around so everyone can touch it, and maybe ponder together how this item might relate to the story you just read.*³

Step 3 - Discuss the question for reflection and sharing. *If you’re doing this service with children, and the question is a little too hard for them to wrap their minds around, feel free to skip this step, or come up with another question that helps you think about the story. (If you’re doing this service alone, feel free to use this time as reflection/meditation on the question or just in general)*

Step 4 - Say the prayer for that reading. You can say it together, or you could have your family take turns reading the prayer. Again, be creative with this.

Step 5 - Extinguish the candle/turn out the light/etc.

And then, rinse and repeat up until the 8th reading. After the 8th reading everyone places their stones upon the altar/table/surface. Let the silence sit for a bit, and then say the final prayer together. Keep in mind, there is no candle/light for the 8th reading, so you will be in darkness (hint hint, keep a flashlight or other light handy).

You close the service in whatever way feels comfortable. You can strip the altar that you have made for this week. You can sit in silence and meditation for a bit. You can invite everyone to depart the room in silence. You can make your kids go to bed now that they’re hopefully quieted down and relaxed. Or, if they’re stir crazy, just continue on with your evening. This is **your** time.

Tenebrae- A Stay-at-Home Service of Darkness

With excerpts from *Daily Prayer With the Corrymeela Community* by Pádraig Ó Tuama

A Prayer of Shelter and Shadow

It is in the shelter of each other that the people live.

It is in the shadow of each other that the people live.

We know that sometime we are alone,

And sometimes we are in community.

Sometimes we are in shadow,

And sometimes we are surrounded by shelter.

Sometimes we feel like exiles -

In our land, in our languages, and in our bodies.

And sometimes we feel surrounded by welcome.

As we seek to be human together,

May we share the things that do not fade:

Generosity, truth-telling, silence, respect and love.

And may the power we share

Be for the good of all.

We honour God, the source of this rich life.

And we honour each other, story-full and lovely.

Whether in our shadow or in our shelter,

May we live well

And fully

With each other.

Amen.

Station 1: Jesus prays at Gethsemane

Reading: Luke 22:39-46

Item: A cup

Question for reflection/sharing: Have I ever felt like I was being called (by God) to do something that I did not want to do?

Prayer: Jesus, You sometimes left so that people could face themselves. May we face our selves, in the wilderness and the world, and recognize the forces that drive us, so that they do not always drive us. Amen.

Station 2: Jesus is arrested

Reading: Luke 22:47-53

Item: A knife (dull or sharp)

Question for reflection/sharing: When have I harmed or betrayed someone else? When have I been hurt or betrayed? Why? How did I feel?

Prayer: God of all humanity, in times of violence we see how inhuman we can be. We pray for those who, today, are weighed down by grief. We pray for those who, yesterday, were weighed down by grief. And the day before, and all the days before the day before. We pray, too, for those who help us turn towards justice and peace. Turn us all towards justice and peace because we need it. Amen.

Station 3: Peter disowns Jesus

Reading: Luke 22:54-62

Item: A toy chicken or other bird (stuffed animal or other toy)

Question for reflection/sharing: When was a time that I let myself or others down? When was a time that someone else let me down?

Prayer: God of the accused and the accusing, who made the mouths, the ears and the hearts of all in conflict. May we turn ourselves toward that which must be heard, because there we will hear your voice. Amen.

Station 4: Jesus stands before Pilate and Herod

Reading(s): Luke 22:66-23:12 and Matthew 27:23-25

Item: A bottle of hand sanitizer, hand soap, or a bar of soap.

Question: When have I done what was easy, or what other people were doing, because the right thing was hard or unpopular?

Prayer: Gods of Pilate, you are loud and lazy, following the fashions of the day making lies out of love and making mockeries out of meaning. And - so often - we follow you. May we instead, follow that small whisper, even when we barely hear it, even when we barely believe it, even when it hurts. Because this is what love is. This is what love is. Amen.

Station 5: Jesus is sentenced

Reading: Luke 23:23-25

Item: A scale or balance.

Question: When have I unfairly judged someone else? When have I felt unfairly judged?

Prayer: Burdened God, who bore the weight of wood on torn shoulders, We pray for the torn and the burdened, that they may be held together by guts and goodness. Because you were held together by guts and goodness. Amen.

Station 6: Jesus is crucified

Reading: Luke 23:26-43

Item: A nail or handful of nails AND/OR rope or twine or string

Question: When have I felt like I was in a place of darkness or death?

Prayer: Jesus of Nazareth, This cross was a torture. It only gives life because you made it hollow. Bring life to us, Jesus, especially when we are in the places of the dead. Because you brought life even to the instruments of death. Amen.

Station 7: Jesus dies

Reading: Luke 23:44-46

Item: A cross (either decorative or homemade - from popsicle sticks or other household items.)

Question: When have I lost (a person or a pet, or something with great meaning to you)?

Prayer: Jesus of the imagination, You never grew old, always a young man, and most of us grow older than you did. When lives are cut short the living question the meaning of living. May we live with meaning, even when meaning fades, making meaning so that we have something to live for. Amen.

Station 8: Jesus is buried

Reading: Luke 23:50-56

Item: A stone

Prayer: Jesus of the unexpected, for at least some of your life this was not how you imagined its end. Yet even at the end, you kept steady in your conviction. Jesus, keep us steady. Jesus, keep us steady. Because, Jesus, keep us steady. Amen.

Silence for reflection.

Stripping of the altar.