

Good Friday Tenebrae Service, NPMC, April 7, 2023 Compiled by Susanne Guenther Loewen

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Accompanist: Sue Schellenberg ~ Song Leader: Duff Warkentin

Opening Hymn: HWB 242 – Stay with Me

SUSANNE: Good evening and welcome to our Good Friday Tenebrae Service, which continues in our Lenten theme of being On the Road to Healing. Today's theme is healing and death.

Perhaps unexpectedly, Ross Gay's first essay in his book, *Inciting Joy*, is about his father's death from cancer. That wouldn't be something most of us would associate with joy at all, but that's where he begins. And the story isn't about some miraculous recovery or how it all worked out in the end, but rather about how Gay was able to be present – really, truly present – with his father in his last days, to accompany him on that final journey, to put aside his differences and difficulties and surround his father with love as he died. That's what was joyful about that very sorrowful moment, for Gay. So for him, joy has everything to do not with avoiding the hard things like pain, suffering, sorrow heartbreak, but rather with “how we care for each other *through* these things”¹ – even through death.

If you've had a chance to read our Lenten devotional for today, this may remind you of retired hospice physician and cancer patient Bernie Wiebe's comments there about what constitutes a “good” death, or how to live in healing ways even in the midst of dying or a terminal diagnosis. He shares about his own illness this way:

I may well come to a point where there is no more effective treatment or where a suggested treatment will look too burdensome, and I may choose palliative care. Then, I will hope for comfort, for controlled symptoms, for quality time with those who are close and whom I love, hope to make more memories along the way. And we don't know how it will go. ...[E]ven with a disease like cancer we're foolish to predict how it will go. But if I come to a point close to death, I will hope for continued comfort, close times with loved ones, and ultimately for a peaceful passing. So, you know, hope does not disappear as serious disease advances; it simply reshapes itself. There's always something to hope for. The only other thing that I would say: I don't know if I have adequate courage, but I draw strength and encouragement from the memory of the many patients in whose care I've been privileged to participate and many wonderful examples of gracious and courageous living while they were dying.²

There aren't many contexts in our culture in which this kind of gracious “letting go” is spoken about or taught. We are bombarded with messages of “never give up!” and “never let go!” and of illness or aging as a ‘battle’ that we have to win! And yet, at the centre of our faith, there is a story of an unjust and painful death that we have collectively claimed (or reclaimed) as a moment of healing and redemption. A death that heals and brings peace. Is that really possible?

Our service today will centre around these intertwined ideas at work in Good Friday: first, that in undergoing birth, life, and death, Jesus met us within the entire arc of the human story, from birth all the way through death. This means that there is no part of the human

¹ Ross Gay, *Inciting Joy: Essays* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2022), 14-27, 4.

² Excerpt from: Erika Wiebe, with Bernie Wiebe, “A Physician/Brother's Perspective on Aging and Mortality,” *Afterthought Podcast*, Jan. 11, 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/show/3rOf0VMifV525TXpxYc18X?si=f56cbec4095d4c7b&nd=1>

experience where God is not; God remains and abides with us throughout our lives and beyond. And second, that we are called to likewise meet each other and surrounding each other in love, especially in times of pain or grief, death or loss. As Jesus remains with us, we are called to remain with one another. By this, healing will come.

{{EXTINGUISH A CANDLE}}

Gethsemane

Hymn - VT 318 – ‘Tis Midnight, and on Olive’s Brow

LUKE: Blessing for Staying Awake by Jan Richardson³

Even in slumber,
even in dreaming,
even in sorrow,
even in pain:

awake, awake,
awake my soul
to the One who keeps vigil
at all times for you.

PATRICK: A reading from Mark 14:

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴ And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” ³⁵ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” ³⁷ He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? ³⁸ Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ³⁹ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹ He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of [Humanity] is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

⁴³ Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. ⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” ⁴⁵ So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. ⁴⁶ Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. . . .⁵⁰ [And] All of them deserted him and fled. {{EXTINGUISH A CANDLE}}

³ Jan Richardson, “Blessing for Staying Awake: For Holy Thursday,” in *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons* (Orlando, FL: Wanton Gospeller Press, 2015), 134.

Betrayal

Hymn - VT 330 – Ah, Holy Jesus

LUKE: A reading from Mark 14:

⁶⁶ While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. ⁶⁷ When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” ⁶⁸ But he denied it, saying, “I do not know or understand what you are talking about.” And he went out into the forecourt. Then the rooster crowed. ⁶⁹ And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” ⁷⁰ But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.” ⁷¹ But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know this man you are talking about.” ⁷² At that moment the rooster crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

PATRICK: A Prayer of Confession by Anne Macksoud (VT 891) – invite people to follow on the screen

Leader: For the times we have lied to one another
And the times we have been lied to,

People: heal us, Jesus, Saviour of the world.

Leader: For the times we have laughed at another’s pain
And the times we have been laughed at,

People: heal us, Jesus, Saviour of the world.

Leader: For the times we have betrayed a friend
And the times we have been betrayed,

People: heal us, Jesus, Saviour of the world.

Leader: For the times we have spoken when we should have remained silent
And the times we have remained silent when we should have spoken,

People: heal us, Jesus, Saviour of the world.

Special Music: VT 344- Seeking Warmth from Charcoal Blazing

SUSANNE: St. Peter – by Malcolm Guite⁴

Impulsive master of misunderstanding
You comfort me with all your big mistakes;
Jumping the ship before you make the landing,
Placing the bet before you know the stakes.
I love the way you step out without knowing,
The way you sometimes speak before you think,
The way your broken faith is always growing,
The way he holds you even when you sink.

⁴ <https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2012/06/29/a-sonnet-for-st-peter/>

Born to a world that always tried to shame you,
Your shaky ego vulnerable to shame,
I love the way that Jesus chose to name you,
Before you knew how to deserve that name.
And in the end your Saviour let you prove
That each denial is undone by love.

{{EXTINGUISH A CANDLE}}

Trial & Condemnation

PATRICK: From Matthew 27:

¹¹ Now Jesus stood before [Pilate,] the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You say so.” ¹² But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. ¹³ Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?” ¹⁴ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

¹⁵ Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. ¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner called Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷ So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” ¹⁸ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. ¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.” ²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. ²¹ The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” ²² Pilate said to them, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” All of them said, “Let him be crucified!” ²³ Then he asked, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”

LUKE: Psalm 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night but find no rest.

³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴ In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁶ But I am a worm and not human,
scorned by others and despised by the people.
⁷ All who see me mock me;
they sneer at me; they shake their heads;
⁸ “Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver—
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”
⁹ Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.
¹⁰ On you I was cast from my birth,
and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
¹¹ Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is no one to help.
¹² Many bulls encircle me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
¹³ they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.
¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
¹⁵ my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.
¹⁶ For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they bound my hands and feet.
¹⁷ I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
¹⁸ they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.
¹⁹ But you, O LORD, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!

{{EXTINGUISH A CANDLE}}

Hymn - O Sacred Head, Now Wounded - VT 325 (v. 1, 3, 4)

Death

PATRICK: From John 19 & Matthew 27:

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished."

⁵⁰ Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. ⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.

⁵⁴ Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

{{EXTINGUISH A CANDLE}}

SUSANNE: What Abides – By Jan Richardson⁵

You will know this blessing
by how it does not stay still,
by the way it refuses to rest
in one place.

You will recognize it
by how it takes
first one form, then another:

now running down
the face of the mother
who watches the breaking
of the child she had borne,

now in the stance of the woman
who followed him here
and will not leave him
bereft.

Now it twists in anguish
on the mouth of the friend

⁵ Jan Richardson, "What Abides: For Good Friday," in *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons* (Orlando, FL: Wanton Gospeller Press, 2015), 137-8.

whom he loved;

now it bares itself
in the wound, the cry,
the finishing and final breath.

This blessing
is not in any one
of these alone.

It is what
binds them
together.

It is what dwells
in the space
between them,
though it be torn
and gaping.

It is what abides
in the tear
the rending makes.

LUKE: A reading from Sarah Bessey:⁶

“In the Scriptures, there is one little thing often overlooked on Good Friday. In Matthew 27:51, we are told that at the moment when Jesus cried out and gave up his spirit, the moment he died, **the veil in the temple that symbolically stood between God and [humanity], the entrance to the Holy of Holies, was torn in two... from the top to the bottom.**

There is no barrier between us any more, the Holy of Holies is open to us all and it’s not because of anything we did or didn’t do. Because this was a rescue, this was redemption, this was the death that made death die, this was the moment when all of creation was redeemed as Jesus swept into the domain of death and hell, suffering and sickness, sin and horror. ...

And when I think of that veil being torn from the top to the bottom, now I imagine God sweeping into the world, like a mother to her crying child in the darkness with that physical yearning, gathering us up out of our loneliness and our hunger, our longing and our needs to whisper: *I’m here, I’m here, you’re not alone, I’m here. I’ve got you, I’ve got you, I’ve got you darling, I’m here.*”

Special Music - VT 328 – Mary, Woman Weeping

⁶ Sarah Bessey, “I’m here, you’re not alone,” *Sarah Bessey official website*, posted 2022, accessed March 14, 2023, <https://www.sarahbessey.com/essays/here-not-alone>

Burial

PATRICK: A reading from Mark 15:

⁴² When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, ⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. ⁴⁴ Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. ⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. ⁴⁶ Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. ⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where the body was laid.

{{EXTINGUISH A CANDLE}}

SUSANNE: From theologian Shelly Rambo:⁷

“Trauma tells us that there is no clean break from the past, of death behind and life ahead. Trauma tells us that death returns, haunting the life that follows. In trauma, ‘death’ persists in life.... [However,] The suffering is accompanied; it is witnessed. Spirit maintains a connection to the events of cross and resurrection...the breath of witness to what remains [or abides]. ...The theological affirmation forged in the face of this reality is as follows: love remains.” Jesus’ call in John 15 for the disciples to ‘remain’ “is often interpreted in terms of belief. Jesus is asking the disciples to continue to believe in him, even when he has left them. This interpretation misses something critical about both the context and the urgency of Jesus’ parting words. They are being asked to do more than maintain belief in him. They are, instead, placed on the other side of his death and asked to witness love there. Remain in me. Remain in my love.”⁸

LUKE: A reading from John 15:

⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit ...⁷ If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

PATRICK: Psalm 139:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.

⁷ Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 156, 159.

⁸ Rambo, 104.

³ You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.
⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and night wraps itself around me,"
¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

Closing Song: VT 329 - Were You There (v. 1-4 congregation, solo v. 5?)

{{EXTINGUISH LAST CANDLE}}

SUSANNE: Benediction:

Blessing for a Broken Vessel – by Jan Richardson

Do not despair.
You hold the memory
of what it was to be whole.

It lives deep in your bones.
It abides in your heart
that has been torn
and mended
a hundred times.

It persists in your lungs
that know the mystery
of what it means
to be full,
to be empty,
to be full again.

I am not asking you
to give up your grip
on the shards you clasp
so close to you

but to wonder
what it would be like
for those jagged edges to meet each other
in some new pattern
that you have never imagined,
that you have never dared
to dream.