

4/10/22 PALM/PASSION SUNDAY WITH HS YOUTH GROUP

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leaders: Together we seek the way of God, a way so different from the ways of this world.

People: We remind ourselves to loosen our grasp, to trust instead of control.

Leaders: We praise a God we cannot see and celebrate a salvation we do not deserve or fully understand.

People: In worship we give of ourselves and we receive the disarming power of God.

Leaders: We celebrate, proclaiming:

All: *Blessed is the One who comes in the power of God's name.*

OPENING PRAYER

Dear God, let us feel your presence in our time of worship today.

We thank you for Jesus who entered Jerusalem on a donkey rather than a warhorse. People thought he wasn't the real deal – like a foundation stone that the construction workers threw out. But your plan was for Jesus to be the cornerstone holding up a great new building.

God, your ways are higher than our ways. Show us how to trust in Jesus, especially when we feel rejected, because Jesus knew rejection.

Blow our minds with your awesome love, Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER – PASTOR CALEB

ADORATION

God everlasting,

We live and move and have our being in you. Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

You are the maker of unfathomable galaxies and incredible complexity of life, and we owe our very being and breath to you.

More than that, you are our lover and redeemer, as you also redeem all things.

CONFESSION

God, we know that your way of doing things is not our way of doing things. We would never have wanted to submit to a path that led to the cross.

We would be happy to join the crowd, waving branches, but not so sure we would stand with you in your hour of trial.

Your wisdom makes no sense to us. Your foolishness is higher than our wisdom. Your thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

As we contemplate what it meant for Jesus to die on a roman cross, we ask that you would stretch us to loosen our grip on control over our own lives, or over other people.

Help us to accept the kind of suffering that is necessary to allow the seeds of resurrection to be planted within us.

Forgive us for thinking that we get to write our own stories, without any major sacrifices or pain, rather than opening ourselves to the kind of love that Jesus taught us.

This year, help us to be moved in new ways by Jesus' resolve and unwavering love as he went to the cross.

THANKSGIVING

We give thanks for this great salvation – this great story of sin and death turned into life.

We give thanks for the young people who are involved in our service today. We give thanks for their part in our church body, and for the gifts they are discovering, developing, and offering.

We also give thanks for the MCC sale that took place this past weekend, for the fun, the experience of volunteering, and for the proceeds raised to support relief and peace work around the world. Work through these efforts, O God.

SUPPLICATION

You hear our prayers before we speak, and yet you welcome our prayers. So, with confidence we lay our requests before you.

Hear the prayers that are on our hearts, and let your Spirit intercede for us with sighs too deep for words.

We pray for the family of Marlin and Sheri and especially their daughter Karis and son-in-law Joel and grandson Jackson as they all grieve the loss of baby Ezekiel. Even a brief time of 24 hours on earth is sacred and precious in your sight, O God.

Comfort this family in their grief. Walk with them in their journey.

We pray as well for Louise Schmidt and her families as Louise reaches the end of her earthly life and waits patiently to meet Jesus. We thank you for the witness of her strong faith. We ask for your grace and consolation to be with Louise and her family.

We pray for Irvin Goertzen and his family after his step-granddaughter died unexpectedly. Be with Irvin and his family as they live with and processes this news.

We enlarge our prayers to include our hurting world.

We continue to offer prayers for peace in Ukrainian soil. We pray for truth and justice to prevail and for hope for those in grief at the loss of home, livelihood, and loved ones, and for courage for those speaking the truth at great personal risk.

We pray for the people of El Salvador who are experiencing political upheaval, reeling under gang violence and repressive government. Lord have mercy, when our world seems so full of trouble.

We pray, finally, for the unspoken desires of our hearts.

(silence)

God, let our greatest desire be to love and serve you and one another. Grant us your mercy, and strengthen us with your Spirit.

Today we remember that there is nothing in death or in life, in the present or the future, no power, height or depth or anything in all of creation that separates us from your love that is in Christ Jesus.

Amen

SCRIPTURE AND DRAMA

1. PETER AND JOHN

Luke 22:14-20, 24-34

Peter: So John, I was thinking about that last meal we had with Jesus...

John: Yeah, I sure won't ever be able to forget that night. So, what about it, Peter?

Peter: I was thinking about how clueless we were. *We really* just didn't get it.

John: So after all this time, you just now came to that startling insight?

Peter: No! Of course, I've thought about it before. But I'm thinking about it from another angle.

John: OK...

Peter: Well, you remember a bunch of you were arguing about who was greatest, like you were still in Junior High.

John: And *you* weren't in on that discussion?

Peter: No, I'm pretty sure I kept my mouth shut.

- John: Oh, I see (sarcastically). You just denied Jesus three times, that's all. And Jesus totally saw *that* coming. You even denied that you would deny him, and then you went and denied him.
- Peter: (Sigh) I... ok, fine, you're right, but we basically *all* chickened out. At least I went to the palace of the high priest, close enough to the action that people were questioning me. Where were the rest of you?
- John: You're right, none of us were really seeing the big picture. Jesus really turned everything upside-down. Greatness not through lording it over others, but rather greatness through service. That's what he demonstrated in his ministry and even in his trial and crucifixion.
- Peter: Yep, that's what I was just thinking about and still trying to figure out. We were motivated by the idea of becoming rulers ourselves and we were also afraid of defeat – forgetting that Jesus promised a resurrection. We abandoned Jesus as soon as the going really got rough.
- John: So maybe what you're saying is that we have to keep remembering that final night with Jesus, so that we can carry on the work Jesus left us with.

2. PILATE'S WIFE

Luke 23:13-25

Pilate's wife: It's not easy being the wife of a politician. I mean, there are perks. I can have any luxury I ever ask for. The best food, I get to travel – I've seen places other women could only dream of seeing.

But it's also really lonely. The life of the rich and famous isn't what people think it is. My husband is often gone, and even when he is physically present, his head is somewhere else. He doesn't tell me much about the affairs of state he is dealing with. Sometimes I find out at the last minute that there are visiting imperial officials and generals from Rome, so my attendants have to quickly bath me and dress me up so I can appear at some state function as his trophy wife.

Every year, Pilate goes to the city of Jerusalem at the time of the its biggest annual festival. So many pilgrims flock into the city, the streets are filled to the brim. We know that there is plenty of anti-Rome sentiment among some of the Jewish population, so it is important for the governor and several imperial legions to watch to make sure nothing gets out of hand.

I actually kind of enjoy going to Jerusalem. The city has its charm, and the Jewish temple is very impressive. I enjoy watching the festivities from a distance. This year was different because of this supposed insurrectionist that had quite a following. A Jew from Galilee named Jesus. Normally, Pilate says very little about judicial cases. But this one really had him perplexed.

The Jerusalem authorities arrested this Jesus, but Pilate just wasn't seeing the security threat. I wouldn't normally lose sleep over a Galilean peasant. But my attendants had contacts in Jerusalem and told me what the word on the street was about this Jesus. This guy was healing people, inspiring hope among the poorest, and creating a whole movement that wasn't at all violent. That night I had a strange dream that left me convinced it would be a horrible injustice to let anything happen to this man.

Pilate is always busy during the day, so I sent him a message. I know he has to appear ruthless – that's how the game of politics is played. But I also know, as his wife, that deep down he has a tender side too. I could see there was a riot forming over this Jesus guy, but it wasn't the followers of Jesus disturbing the peace; it was the people that wanted him killed. I don't understand. Why isn't there a way to grow a prosperous empire without resorting to such brutal instruments like crucifixion? It breaks my heart.

3. JESUS AND SIMON OF CYRENE

Luke 23:26-28

²⁶ As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

²⁷ A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him.

²⁸ Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.

Without words, **Jesus** walks down the center aisle, carrying the large wooden cross. The **soldier** follows behind pretending to whip him.

When **Jesus** gets close to the front benches, he stumbles and falls to the ground. The **soldier** runs and forcefully grabs **Simon** of Cyrene (sitting with the other youth) by the arm.

Simon picks up the cross and carries it on stage, placing it into the stand. **Jesus** slowly gets up, pretending to be injured and in pain. He exits.

4. CENTURION

Luke 23:32-34, 44-47

I'm a commander of about 80 soldiers. I know something about respect. What it takes to earn the respect of all the soldiers who are under you, and also the respect that you owe other people. I would never be able to give leadership to our unit if I didn't give respect to each of my soldiers precisely when it is due. Those of us who have risen through the ranks to become centurions know a lot about discipline. We have to be disciplined and we maintain strict discipline in the unit.

Jerusalem is a volatile city, so when we are stationed here, it is always about watching for what is amiss, who we should be watching carefully to ensure there won't be an insurrection or riot.

Our government conducts crucifixions to let people know you don't mess with Rome. I know some people criticize it as overly-brutal punishment. They fail to remember we're talking about the worst of the worst. We also aim to send a clear message to the people. There's a reason we catch up on overdue crucifixions right when Jerusalem is full of visitors.

I admit, I have had to stomach a lot of unsettling stuff in my military career, and crucifixion is worse than anything you see on the battlefield. I also don't enjoy being in charge of overseeing them, but I follow the orders I receive as diligently as I expect any soldier to follow *my* orders.

It was the soldiers of my unit that mocked Jesus. For some reason this bothered me. I gave the order to cease on the pretext that we couldn't take all day to get this ordeal over with.

Normally, when you look in the eyes of the victims of crucifixion you see one of two things. Either rage or fear. Some become pathetic, crying and begging for the pain to stop. This Jesus guy was somehow different. There was sadness in his eyes, but not rage and not fear either. He seemed resolute. It's the kind of spirit that the best soldiers have going to a battle that is going to take a lot of guts. A number of people, mostly women, followed to watch and mourn. That's unusual, because usually someone crucified is completely alone.

Crucifixion is just about the worst humiliation there is. But somehow, I couldn't help but feel some respect and admiration for this guy, if such a thing were possible. If anything, it seemed like he felt pity for everyone else. Sorry that the rest of us felt we needed to do such a hideous thing.

This is the first time I feel my conscience pierced, like the spear that pierced his side. Then there's the fact that the sky grew incredibly dark. The clouds were so thick and black you lost track of where the sun was supposed to be at. *Something* strange was going on. Surely this was a righteous man. I don't know why the high God would send anyone to be crucified, but I knew this Jesus had to be a man of God.

I'm not sure I ever want to oversee a crucifixion again. But more importantly, I have to find out more about this Jesus. How did he become victim to such a terrible injustice, and what was his mission? I have lots of questions.

5. WOMEN WHO WERE MOURNING

Luke 23:48-56

(names taken from Mark 15:40); Speaking mournfully

Mary Magdalene What a tragedy! Oh Jesus, how could this happen to you? You are last person to deserve this!

Mary mother of James How could we let this happen to you?

Salome What do we do now? We were hoping this was the one God was sending to redeem Israel!

- Mary J. I don't even know where all the disciples are. Everyone seems to be scattered. I just didn't think it would end like this. Were we mistaken about Jesus?
- Mary M. I don't think so. I still have faith. I don't know what that means really. I don't know what God will do after this tragedy, but deep down I can't shake my faith.
- Salome Mary Magdalene, I wish I had your faith. I believed too. Jesus changed my life. But what Messiah gets crucified? Our leaders are nowhere to be seen. I mean, we have to be realistic.
- Mary J. I hear you, Salome. I'm wondering all these things too. But I refuse to just "move on," as they say. I will weep a flood of tears if I have to.
- Salome Tears won't bring him back.
- Mary J. I will at least honor Jesus with my tears. And we can do even more than that to honor him in his death.
- Mary M. What do you mean, Mary?
- Mary J. Well, I overheard that Joseph who is on the council asked Pilate for the body and has given Jesus a decent burial. So I say we prepare spices and perfumes to anoint his body.
- Salome (sarcastically) Well, praise God for a good burial! God at least gave us that mercy, I guess. (sigh) Well, anointing the body would at least give us something to do. But are you remembering that it's only a few hours until the Sabbath?
- Mary J. We get as much ready as we can and prepare to go find his body on the first day of the week.
- Mary M. (sniffling) I think this is a great idea. I think this will help us with our grief. I don't know what God is doing, but I trust that God is not finished with Jesus just yet.