

Midweek Lenten Service



Artwork done by Jayden Kim

The Purpose of Suffering: Reflecting on the importance of the suffering of Christ and the Church.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF HOLLYWOOD

The purpose of the Lenten services is to invite us into a time of contemplation as we look at the way in which our Lord suffered, the necessity of that suffering, and the importance of our participation in that suffering. While Advent was a time of curiosity and wonder, Lent is a time for us to reflect on the centrality of the Cross.

If you are not participating in the live stream, we invite you to individually or communally work through the liturgy that was designed for this service.

Call to Worship

Ruth Schmidt

Our theme for the service tonight is on the *Purpose of Suffering*. Lent is a time to sit in the tension of Christ's willingness to go through suffering for our sake.

As we meditate on that, I want to invite our hearts into a space of worship with the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a twentieth-century Jesuit philosopher.

"Since once again, Lord, I have neither bread nor wine nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labors and suffering of the world."

We don't have a church building to be in tonight, or communion, or chairs, or stained-glass windows, but God is with us and sees our work and our stress and meets us in these things. We can enter into worship knowing that God is just as present with us right now as he ever has been.

Opening Prayer

Written by Jourdan Turner

Lent is the season where we walk with Christ toward the cross. We walk toward the resurrection, yes, but first we walk through the suffering, through the shaming, through the loneliness, through the darkness, the abandonment, the fear. This year, this moment in history has brought all this into relief for us, a stark new reality. The suffering, loneliness, fear and darkness are palpable daily realities. Christ, in this season we walk with you, but in truth you walk with US. You carry us, sustain us with your very self. God, we offer ourselves to you this evening. Holy Spirit, encircle us in this time of worship, meet us here with your comfort and give us courage to walk this path with Christ.

Opening Psalm – Psalm 22

Dean Choi

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

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

²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;

and by night, but find no rest.

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

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

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

⁶But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.

⁷All who see me mock at me; they make mouths 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!”

⁹Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.

¹⁰On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

¹¹Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

¹²Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

¹³they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

¹⁴I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax;

it is melted within my breast;

¹⁵my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me.

My hands and feet have shriveled;

¹⁷I can count all my bones.

They stare and gloat over me;

¹⁸they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

¹⁹But you, O LORD, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!

²⁰Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog!

²¹Save me from the mouth of the lion!

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

²²I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

²³You who fear the LORD, praise him!

All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

²⁴For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted;

he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.

²⁵From you comes my praise in the great congregation;

my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

²⁶The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD.

May your hearts live forever!

²⁷All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;

and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

²⁸For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.

²⁹To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;

before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,

and I shall live for him.

³⁰Posterity will serve him;

future generations will be told about the Lord,

³¹and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,

saying that he has done it.

Prayer for Illumination

Written by Tom Hartshorn

Holy God Creator

Your breath brought life out of dust.

May your Holy Spirit breathe on us tonight as Your Scriptures are read.

Let the word proclaimed open our hearts, minds and souls to life.

May it awaken and renew our Hope in You.

Amen

Old Testament Reading - Isaiah 53

Tom Hartshorn

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ²For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. ⁴Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ⁸By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. ⁹They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the LORD shall prosper. ¹¹Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹²Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

²⁵ It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷ And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁹ Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!" ³¹ In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him. ³³ When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." ³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." ³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

Time of Silence (*Spend 2-3 minutes in silent reflection*)

Homily

Written by Ruth Schmidt

"The Importance of the Cross"
Text: Mark 8:34-38

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Well, friends, welcome to April 2020 in the middle of a global pandemic. I know this is not how we thought we'd be spending the final Lenten service.

In light of the radical change, grief, and stress the virus has brought to our world and our homes, I want to invite you to check in with your body before we begin. Be fully present where you are and the reality that God's Spirit is with you.

If your shoulders are high, let them fall away from your ears.

If your fists are clenched, I invite you to release them.

If your gaze is strong, you can now soften it.

If your breathing has been shallow, breathe in deeply now and fill your lungs and your belly.

Breathe in God's mercies, and exhale God's mercies to the world.

Sit back and be aware that your body doesn't have to hold in the stress and sadness your emotions might have been processing all day.

And if this feels like a little too much "New Age" voodoo for you, just remember that the Creator God made our bodies to be a companion to our emotions as a holistic unit. Part of how we were made is that calming our body will also help calm our hearts and minds. We can slow our breathing to help our hearts remember that God's divine presence is with us.

And that's part of the journey of Lent after all. To remember that divinity was in a holistic human body that felt pain, so we don't have to be alone in our suffering. That person is Jesus.

We will be reading out of Mark today and it's a perfect place to be. I don't know about you, but I've experienced a wide range of emotions as I grapple with the suffering and struggle facing our families and our world right now. And Mark doesn't shy away from emotion. Things happen fast in the Gospel of Mark. Many paragraphs start with the words, "immediately" or "right away".

As I read Mark again this week, I was able to connect with it in a new way because things in our current world seem to be moving very fast around us too. Not only are things volatile right now, they are emotionally charged. Everyone is coping in a different way and at a different pace. We find that in the Book of Mark as well. And Jesus is not void of emotion.

It describes Jesus as stern, grieved, he rebukes, he is strict, is angered, amazed, has compassion and pity.

For me, one of the most compassionate glimpses into Christ's emotions in Mark is when his disciples get word that John the Baptist has been murdered. Their friend is dead. Jesus sees his tired, hungry, sad friends and invites them into a place of rest. He says, "come away to a deserted place by yourselves and rest awhile."

If those are the words of Christ you need to hear right now, please accept His invitation.

As Christians we are called into both the rest and sacrifice of Christ. It's his invitation of sacrifice that we're going to spend the most time on together tonight. And instead of a sermon, I want to approach the Scriptures with you in the posture of accompaniment. I want to walk by your side and let God speak to us together. Let's be friends together in this moment.

Our passage for tonight is Mark 8:34-38. (*Text Above*).

Jesus is talking about the self-sacrifice of our lives and comparing it to hoarding the possessions of the world.

Has there been a more poignant time in your life to hear these words from Christ?

I have never been faced with a season in our global community that requires me to be closer to the reality of sacrifice.

Jesus brings up this topic because a few verses earlier Peter didn't want to hear about suffering. Jesus was telling his disciples that He was going to die and Peter couldn't take it.

This is that famous line when Jesus looks at Peter and says, "Get behind me Satan."

Peter either didn't believe that suffering was necessary.

Or

Peter was uncomfortable with the idea of someone he loved having to suffer and die.

This seems like a great time for Jesus to lean in, put a hand on Peter's shoulder and say, "I know it's hard, my friend. I am with you." It seems like compassion would have been a good way to go. After all, Peter was only disturbed by what he heard.

Peter is another strong emotional force in the Bible. He feels deeply and he speaks openly.

But in this case, Jesus isn't having it. He not only shuts Peter down, he tells Peter that the only way to follow in the way of Jesus is to be open to suffering himself.

But why? Why are followers of Jesus called to be ready to suffer? Why is that part of being a Christian? And why does Jesus have such a strong response to Peter?

We don't have the time to get into a discussion about the origins of evil and suffering.

But we can talk briefly about what was on the line for Jesus. And why Jesus needed to respond so harshly to someone trying to sidestep suffering.

Could it have been that Jesus wasn't just defending his own suffering? Yes, he was about to go to the cross literally and needed to stay focused on that. But could he have also been defending the suffering of all the people in the future to come?

Could he have been so fiercely protective of the weak and marginalized? The ones who would have unbearable lives unless his followers were ready to suffer next to them? Was Jesus also talking about us being ready to suffer communally for the sake of one another?

When Jesus says in these verses that we should lose our lives for his sake, what does that mean? What is our cross? What does he want from us?

Maybe we're forgetting his words. Maybe like me, you forgot that Jesus said when we help the least of these we are helping him. When we give a drink of water to someone who is thirsty, we are giving a drink to him. He identified himself with the poor, the needy, the sick, the lonely, the awkward, the outcast... and he said that when we lose our lives for them, we lose it for him.

Maybe that's part of why Jesus was so angry. *By denying the need to suffer in solidarity, Peter was turning his back on all those in need for generations to come.*

So what does this look like now, for us? What does it look like to lose your life and take up your cross? Yes, you are stuck at home, and you are giving up a lot to help your neighbors by staying inside. Anyone can carry the virus so we are separated. But you might be called to help pay someone's rent, donate to refugee funds so they eat, sacrifice your career to be able to support your family in a different way in our future economy, or have a family member move in after the health crisis is over. I think most of us will have drastically different lives in the next six months. When that change hits, remember these words of Jesus. That if you lose our life and take up your cross, you will save it through Him.

Some people are losing a lot more right now than just their freedom and mobility.

I have about a dozen friends who are nurses and doctors. I'm sure you do too.

Their lives have been turned into a daily, living sacrifice. And some of them might literally lose their lives in the months to come to save patients — people who are created in God's image.

I asked them what their message to you would be. If they could step out of the hospital for a moment and step into the pulpit of our church. More than a dozen nurses got back to me and here are a few of the things they shared:

“ We don’t have the option to stay home, so please serve your brothers and sisters by staying home if you can. This is a huge way to show love to each other and our communities. It’s important for people to know that nurses understand others are making sacrifices too. We are all making sacrifices. Even when we are tempted, we need to stick to what we know is right. The longer this lasts the more devastation it will bring as we all know.”

“ It’s devastating to see how certain areas are lacking in support when it comes to supplies, but we love when our communities reach out, check on us.

“ Hospital management wants us to be quiet and not give any thoughts publicly because they don’t want us to scare the public. That is actually kind of scary to me, and frustrating.”

“I’ve been reminded lately of my call to serve. Anxiety takes me over sometimes as we continue to learn each day something new about this virus and how deadly it can be. It’s terrifying, but I continue to show up, because down to my core I know I am called to take care of the sick and help protect God’s people.

We are all called to serve. However you are called, I encourage you to do it like you’ve never done before, even if that means staying home during this time.”

We learn what sacrifice looks like in community and right now our healthcare workers are helping us understand what it means to follow Jesus’ words in our context. I know we are all praying for our nurses and doctors, and I encourage you that as you pray with your words, that your body is also acting as a living prayer as you stay in your homes.

When Jesus told his friends that they must lose their lives and take up their cross, he was talking to us as well. Some might literally lose our lives. But all of us are called to voluntarily lose our lives for the sake of the neighbors around us. In the words of Romans 12 we are invited to be a “living sacrifice”.

Please join me in prayer.

Jesus, we turn to you. You are the friend who invites us to get away to a deserted place and rest. And you are the God who fiercely defends suffering for the sake of others. Make us into the embodiment of your good news by sacrificing for our neighbors, not demanding that suffering shouldn’t take place because we are Christians. May we set an example for the world by being the first to surrender our rights and do what’s best for our communities. Our hope, God, is in you, not because you take the suffering away, but because you are the God who opened yourself up to suffering for the good of your friends. Give us the courage and bravery to follow you. Your grace, mercy, and peace be upon us as we step into a new way of losing our lives.

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God,
Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human. He was crucified for us
under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.
And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

Prayer of Confession (*From the Book of Common Worship*)

Nelson Steinert

Gracious God,
our sins are too heavy to carry,
too real to hide,
and too deep to undo.
Forgive what our lips tremble to name,
what our hearts can no longer bear, and what has become for us
a consuming fire of judgment.
Set us free from a past that we cannot change;
open to us a future in which we can be changed;
and grant us grace
to grow more and more in your likeness and image;
Through Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. **Amen.**

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Written by Joel Larson

God of our salvation, tonight as your church, we pray the words of David in Psalm 40.

"I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry."

God of our salvation, this prayer tells our story of waiting and your listening and acting on our behalf. When the people of Israel were enslaved under the oppressive power of Egypt and Pharaoh's rule, your people cried out to you for relief from heavy burdens. You heard their groanings and moved toward them in compassion and freedom. God of our salvation, you listen to us when we groan.

God, now in this Lenten season, we feel acutely the groaning of all creation that waits for redemption, and the groaning of our souls as we wait for you amid a Lenten season that has been heavy with the outbreak of COVID-19. God, you hear us now, as we wait and long for a breakthrough in our own life and this world that you love.

Now, we wait, groan, and take comfort and strength that you incline your ear to us and hear our cries. God, we give you thanks that you are a God who listens to our prayers and our cries for mercy.

We pray with the Psalmist, *"He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."*

God of our salvation, tonight, we thank you that when you hear our cries, you act on our behalf. Your people escaped out of Egypt and were chased down by Pharaoh's chariots into the Red Sea. You swallowed up your people's enemies in that vast sea, and they entered safely to the other side. On the other side, Moses and Miriam sang a song of thanksgiving on solid ground. *"The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation."*

Tonight, God of our salvation, we join in a song and prayer of thanksgiving, for your only Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. He has made a way for us, swallowing up death, through his suffering on the cross and his resurrection. He has carried us across a great divide of despair, sin, and darkness to the solid ground of salvation and freedom in him. Standing on this solid ground, in the light of the cross of Jesus Christ, we sing and pray our thanksgiving. Here, in the light of the cross of Jesus, we join not just as one race or age group, but as one voice. We are your church in Hollywood, and together with believers everywhere, we rely on the cross of Christ for our forgiveness, our life, our health and peace with God, our Father. Tonight with one another and with all believers, we give praise and thanks to you, God, our salvation.

Charge and Blessing

Ruth Schmidt

Friends, hear this benediction and receive this encouragement. That the God who has asked you to be willing to suffer is also the God who invites you away to a deserted place to be renewed. That the God who tells you to take up your cross is also the God who says that his burden is easy and in him we find rest. You are not alone.

May God's presence, grace, and divine hope be with through this difficult season. Go in peace. **Amen.**