



A Good Friday Service at Immanuel: The Way of the Cross

Immanuel United Church invites you to the stations of the cross and reflect on the place of love in our lives (following the reflections of Joan Chittister in “The Way of the Cross - The Path to New Life”). In addition, while walking closely to the stations of the cross together, we hope to share an opportunity to hear the Good Friday stories in a new way — looking at some people around Jesus as “allies.”

This service is inspired by:

- The Way of the Cross – the Path to New Life, written by **Joan Chittister** and art by Janet McKenzie
- William H. Wiggins, Jr., Emeritus Professor of African American and African Diaspora and Folklore and Ethnomusicology, Indiana University, Bloomington, In. (Offered by **American Baptist College of Nashville**, a historically Black college with a liberal arts emphasis)
- **Dr. Itihari Toure**, The Women at the Cross Worship, **Interdenominational Theological Centre**, Atlanta, GA

Call to Worship (from a Good Friday Service, 2011, by Tony McNeill)

Faithful God, we stand in the dim shadows of a cross, longing for resurrection.
But today we pause to remember the pain of the cross, and the pain of the crosses we face.

We pause to cry for Sudan, for Rwanda, for more than one-third of the African continent suffering from full-blown AIDS.
As the disciples wept on that fateful day so long ago, we weep for the Saviour and for the tree, and all the trees that one from which he hung represents.

We cry for our ecology:
Birds slick from oil, forests decimated causing mudslides and runoff, air polluted from our disdain for the creation that cries with us.

As those first disciples wondered whether that fateful day was the end of their dreams, we admit we are afraid that our dream of a just, non-violent world is fleeting and in peril of death.

Help us, God, as we live in the tension between this death and your seeming silence, the time after the crucifixion and before the resurrection, in the name of the crucified one. Amen.

Hymn: VU 121 *Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery*

1st Station: Jesus Is Condemned to Death

Matthew 27: 15-23

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. 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?' For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the judgement 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.' Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, 'Which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas.' Pilate said to them, 'Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?' All of them said, 'Let him be crucified!' Then he asked, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified!'

2nd Station: Jesus Takes Up His Cross

Who does not understand this second station of the cross? Who is it that cannot feel the depth of the emotional anguish that goes with it? In fact, who has not lived through it themselves in some way, somehow in life? After all, the unpredictable burdens of life are part and parcel of being alive. Difficulties are everywhere and at every level of existence: The relationship ends, the friends go, the success goes to someone else, the illness comes on quickly and fells us without warning.

Clearly, there are some things we simply cannot avoid. These things disappoint us, of course. They bear down on our lives in very real ways. They change us, sometimes for life. They try us to the very marrow of our souls and they are not to be dismissed lightly. No doubt about it: It takes courage to carry them well. It is one thing when the tribulations of life come from our own hands. But when we ourselves did nothing deliberate to bring them on, the sting is even worse.

The truth is that there are two distinct kinds of crosses. The first comes to us out of nowhere, without warning, not at our own hand, just one of the circumstances of life. The second kind of cross we make for ourselves. Inadvertently, perhaps, but consciously nevertheless.

What ought not be part of life, however, is the cross that comes from the hand of another determined to oppress and designed to kill spirit or body or both.

Having preached the world of the Beatitudes in a world of violence, having healed the hopeless, questioned the system, opened his arms to the outcasts and challenged the world to live differently so that life would be different for everyone everywhere, the cost of it all in jealousy, resentment, anger and ill will come quickly. It is this burden of malice that is the cross Jesus reaches out to take hold of there. This is the cross he did not want but was willing to accept so that the world might see another way to be alive.

Hymn: VU 141 ***He Never Said a Mumbalin' Word (African American Spiritual)***
<https://youtu.be/h5JTnYTqXaE>

They crucified my Lord,
And he never said a mumbalin' word X 2
Not a word, not a word, not a word.

They pierced him in the side,
And he never said a mumbalin' word X 2
Not a word, not a word, not a word.

He bowed his head and died,
And he never said a mumbalin' word X2
Not a word, not a word, not a word.

3rd Station: Jesus Falls the First Time

4th Station: Jesus Meets His Mother

This fourth station is a life lesson far beyond either the dull or dour particulars of life. This station is about the place of love in life.

It is one thing to have zest enough for the future; it is valiant to recognize reality and to embrace it with spirit. But it is something else entirely to find ourselves alone in the midst of the painful but defining moments of life - birth, death, castigation, humiliation, failure, and rejection. With love we can do anything, even the clouded parts of life, so tenebrous but at the same time so necessary, so commonplace. But without love, we can only die long before death takes us.

Even in the Stations of the Cross we find this comment on human need and human gifting. Even here, in the life of the one we call "the Jesus of history, the Christ of faith," there is a clear sign of the need for support, of the place where care becomes a universal part of the human enterprise.

Central to it all is Mary, the mother, the one who never goes away regardless who says what about this saviour of the people who is at one and the same time the enemy of the state, the apostate of the law. Mary who herself braved the negative reactions of both religion and culture to have this child refuses to deny him now. Love for the outcast is the gift she brings to the

moment. The proclamation of presence is the sermon she preaches. Disgraced in the eyes of the population who have abandoned him, she does nothing to hide her love or her continuing commitment. They have leaned on one another all their lives. No way to change that now. They will simply both suffer this cataclysmic moment together, she for him, he for her, both of them for the sake of world which they serve.



5th Station: Simon Helps Jesus Carry His Cross

Aaron Douglas, *The Crucifixion* (1927). Collection of Camille O. and William H. Cosby.

Aaron Douglas, often called the “Father of the Harlem Renaissance”, revolutionarily broke the traditional depiction of the Crucifixion scene and, instead of focusing primarily on Jesus, he made a black man the largest figure in the painting. The scale of the black man signified his importance, and his suffering overshadowed that of Jesus’. The black man pictured is Simon, who helped Jesus carry his cross in the New Testament. The black Simon helped Jesus with his burden, while the white Romans pierced the side of Jesus and scorned him. The theme of Simon’s strength and suffering, pictured here, eventually became a

political and religious rallying point for African-Americans who believed that the white depiction of Jesus was insulting since the whites helped crucify him.

I am Somebody (Sesame Street), by the Rev. Jesse Jackson
<https://youtu.be/iTB1h18bHIY>

Matthew 27: 32-36, 45-51, 54-56

As the soldiers of the governor went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him.

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o’clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, ‘This man is calling for Elijah.’ At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, ‘Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.’ Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.

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!' Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

The Women at the Cross: (Based on The Women at the Cross Worship, Interdenominational Theological Centre, Atlanta, GA)

As a programmatic component of "Souls of Black Girls," a trans-generational action and education platform that highlights the lives of Black girls and women, The Women at the Cross Worship Performing Arts Worship Service (WATC) took place on April 17, 2019, in the Chapel on the campus of the Interdenominational Theological Center.

According to the Center Director, Dr. Itihari Toure, some of us bear witness to others on the cross as the women in the story of the crucifixion. **We are right now present as the vulnerable are nailed to the cross unable to remove themselves. It is so important that we see them. In this bearing witness we have the opportunity to speak to them about getting off the cross (agency), we have the opportunity to wait for them at their humanity being assaulted (lament), we have the opportunity to be an agent of change and work to get them off the cross (resistance) and, we have the opportunity to be there to catch them and hold them as they come down from the cross (recovery and healing).** This is as true today as it was true in the days of the Marys' in the Bible. The women at the cross had to make the decision to live authentically and chose to follow Yeshua even unto death, to bear witness to the resurrection of justice. Yet, we cannot just see this decision as an individual choice or individual way of being. We must build communities of women that do not succumb to the institutional structures of pretense and manipulation.

6th Station: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Hymn: VU 147 *What Wondrous Love Is This*

7th Station Jesus Falls the Second Time

8th Station: Jesus Meets the Weeping Women of Jerusalem

One moment Jesus is hailed and applauded, lauded and followed. Then arrested without cause, the crowds begin to shout for his blood. He is pushed and pulled, jostled and ogled on the street. Surrounded by soldiers, crushed by the weight of the cross, bleeding and exhausted, he has gone from revered teacher and wonder-worker to ignominious criminal, outcast, derelict in the society.

And then the miracle happens. The world's most unlikely group of supporters steps into the scene. They were not the apostles and disciples who had enhanced their own reputations by their association with him. They were not a group of people whom he had healed in the course of his ministry. They were not a group of people whom he had healed in the course of his ministry. They were not people of influence or the upper class whose testimony and character witness he might have needed. No, they were no one of importance at all. They were, in fact, just women. They were a rag-tag body of women whose brave presence made it clear that Jesus who had been condemned by the upper class was, nevertheless, a hero to the underclass. In fact, it was for that very reason that the upper class had to get ride of him.

The women weep for Jesus, condemned and censured for all to see. But the call is for more than compassion.

This station calls us to look again at those we ignore. We are called to look with care. We are called to really see the situations in which they live. We are called to forego the criticism that condemns people whose lives and circumstances we do not know to the margins of society forever. We are called to realize that we ignore these people to our peril as well as theirs.

Hymn: VU 182 ***Stay With Us Through the Night***

9th Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time

Were You There?

Mrs. Sims Warren, a church soloist and founder of "The Center for Worship and the Word, Inc., which presents the ministry of music through praise and worship," has this special relationship to the second Spiritual, "Where You There?" "This song," she wrote, "is especially meaningful to me. On Easter Sunday 1968, the Sunday immediately following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., I sang it at the Community Church in mid-Manhattan, where a civil rights advocate, the Reverend Donald Harrington, was pastor. As I sang this heartfelt song, NBC-TV filmed the service, trying to capture the grief of the nation in light of the shame of this incident. Martin Luther King, Jr. was truly a soldier of freedom, whose heart was to 'set the captives free' from poverty and injustice—regardless of race or social, cultural, or economic status."

The single contemporary Gospel Song that Mrs. Sims selected was Andraé Crouch's "The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power." Mr. Crouch, the son of Bishop Benjamin J. Crouch, the founder of the Christ Memorial Church of God in Christ in the San Fernando Valley of California, composed this song at the tender age of thirteen. CeCe and BeBe Winans sing "The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power" in the following video.

The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power: <https://youtu.be/jTdH1z2VYrg> (as the tribute to Andrae Crouch)

10th Station: Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

11th Station: Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

Matthew 27:57-61

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

Hymn: *Were You There?* *Negro Spiritual* (*Debbie Crump*)

12th Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross

The question now becomes how is it possible to go on alone? How is it possible to compensate for, let alone replace, what has been lost? What is now denied the lives of those whose own life depended on the deceased in ways far beyond the economic, far beyond the mere matter of getting through the day, is not only irreplaceable, it is paralyzing. It is enough to stop the natural flow of life completely.

And then, too, what about the person whose life has been cut off, like black twine in dark night? What about the dead dream that can never now be completed? What happens to those who dreamed it together or trusted in its coming, whatever it was?

These are empty times for everyone. These are times that crush spirits and stop hearts, abort plans and blur visions deeply. Life hollows out, one way or another, for everyone concerned.

These are times that stretch faith in life to the break point. These moments suspend time for everyone.

The twelfth station of the cross brings us face to face with the finality of defeat. Sometimes things don't have a happy ending in life. They just grind on until loss becomes the new normal.

Sometimes we fail.

Sometimes we're beaten.

Sometimes we're lost. Sometimes we're humiliated. Sometimes we're misunderstood.

Sometimes we are abandoned by the very people we love most in life and who we thought also loved us. At that point, without doubt, something in us dies.

Then we learn that there's no going back to things that once were but are no more. The old breath goes out of us and all we can do is to surrender to the dark. It is not a pretty moment. It can take all the energy we have.

The question with which the twelfth station confronts us is an awesome one: Am I able to accept the daily deaths of life, both the great ones and the small, knowing that death is not the end of life, only its passing over to something new in me? Hopefully, I learn from the Jesus who gave up himself, his mission, his life in ways that all seemed totally wrong, that the deaths I died may bring new life to the world around me as well.

13th Station: Jesus Is Taken Down from the Cross

14th Station: Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

Extinguishing of the Christ Candle

As we extinguish the flame, we acknowledge the pain and sorrow we each have experienced, the pain and sorrow we each have caused, we acknowledge our deep yearning for healing, wholeness and new life, and we remember the death of the one called Jesus of Nazareth.

Departure in silence