



LENTEN PRAYER SERVICE

SETTING: A crucifix

LEADER:

It seemed to be a routine crucifixion. People were present: groups of on-lookers and name callers and the usual officials. But yet there was the sense that this was no ordinary criminal. We listen to their secret thoughts of cowardice and courage, skepticism and faith, cruelty and compassion, despair and hope.

Listen! Do you see reflections of yourself?

Ask yourself! How would I have acted if you were there?

READER 1

I AM PILATE

I told them all I am innocent of this man's blood. I had to release him to them for fear of what would have happened to me if I did not do as they wanted. I need my job and not only fear those over me but despise them. I know in my heart that this man is innocent, but deliberately choose injustice because of my insecurity.

Do not act astonished or surprise by my cowardice. I am but one man. You can see my actions replicated in other leaders and yes, maybe by you yourself. Can you think of examples? Can you hear me say, "I was only following orders," when I inflict pain and injustice and humiliation on innocent people. Have you ever said that?

Don't look at me in disdain. How often have you said, "I am innocent of their blood,".....when you close your ears to the cries of the poor, the sick, the hungry,

the helpless, the imprisoned, the unwanted? Do you find any part of me in yourself? Do you ask; "What is truth?" while the person of truth is standing right in front of you giving you every chance to accept him/her and the freedom he/she brings.

PAUSE for reflection

READER 2

I AM SIMON OF CYRENE

You don't know me. I am an uneducated working man of the country. I make my work by my strength. You may see me in the fields, cleaning the streets, feeding the animals or in a carpenter shop. You may glance at me as you pass by or not even notice me.....as if I was not there. You may be thankful you are not sweaty or dirty like me from working under the burning sun day in and day out.

Today a strange thing happened. I returned to the city exhausted and needing to refresh myself and relax and some soldier forced me to help carry the cross of some criminal. He was on his way to his crucifixion at Golgotha. Some look at me and only see a beast of burden, but I am thankful to God for creating me with a strong back and hands that can work tirelessly. It is an honor to help others no matter what the circumstances.

Something happened to me when I picked up the cross. I look at his hands and they are like mine, rough and strong. His feet are sturdy and worn as those of a wanderer. His face is like those I see in the fields, in workshops, out fishing and mending the nets. I look into his eyes and I see he is nearly collapsing under the weight of this cross, but yet there is an indomitable fire in his eyes as if he willingly chooses to continue on his way. I do not see rebellion or hatred, but purpose in his suffering.

This man is one of us! He is no criminal! He smiles at me and his eyes speak of peace and fill me with peace. As he tries to speak to me the soldiers jab me in the back and tell me to "Hurry, we don't have all day." I do believe he was going to encourage me.....to send me on a journey that will take much longer than the one

I am on today with him. I pick up the cross. I follow him and willingly help carry his cross. I am glad I was singled out. Has that ever happened to you? What do you do and does it change your life?

PAUSE for reflection

READER 3

I AM A WOMAN OF JERUSALEM

Jesus! Friend Jesus, has it come to this at last. I knew you, Jesus. Your parents brought you with them to Jerusalem when you were a young lad. Do you remember?

I saw you again years later when you had grown to manhood. When I came to you, you never turned me away or made me feel unimportant or that I was someone who lived in the shadow of another's life. The other women and I would talk when we were alone. We used to say that you were the only man who understood what it meant to be a woman. You elevated us by how you accepted us and listened to us. You taught us our value and our dignity. We too are followers and friends. When you called us "sons" of your father we understood that in you there is no male or female.

Here I am crying and mourning, making a public spectacle of myself; but Jesus, I am here. I will stay with you until the end.

Wait! You are stopping. You are turning to speak to us! You are telling us we should cry for ourselves and our children. How can we overcome the shame of this moment? What does it all mean? Is there one final lesson you are teaching us? Is there an ultimate meaning in all this suffering which you are enduring? Will we learn it? Will you lead us by this final deed to our salvation? Do you mean to save us, we who cannot save ourselves?

PAUSE for reflection

SONG: Were You There When They Crucified My Lord? YouTube
(There are a variety of selections but some are not complete. You might
try - **jinu03** - 3 minutes36 seconds)

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord.

Were you there when they nailed Him to a tree?
Were you there when they nailed him to a tree?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they nailed him to a tree?

Were you there when they laid Him in a tomb?
Were you there when they laid him in a tomb?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they laid him in a tomb?

Were you there when He rose up from the dead?
Were you there when He rose up from the dead?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when He rose up from the dead?

READER 4

I AM JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

Nicodemus, Nicodemus, how could it have come to this? How is it that you and I
are now actors in this final scene of this despised drama in our people's history? I
insist that there is no excuse, no justification for what has occurred over the past

few days. I am ashamed! Do you realize we are burying the crucified body of our Messiah? What happened, Nicodemus?

I know you must think I acted shamefully begging Pilate for the body. Yet I would do it again. Somewhere, sometime, someday, I want people to look back at this moment of disgrace and say, "Here was a Jew whose actions reflect his abhorrence to this evil..... to these lies."

We are almost finished. Do not cry. It is over. He is wrapped up tightly. We should leave, but....Nicodemus, would you tell me again what he said to you the first night you went to him.....the part about our need to be born again? I'll never forget that! Born of the Spirit you say. Everyone who believes in him has eternal life.

Well it's a beautiful thought, Nicodemus. I hoped it would happen. He even said he must be lifted up! I guess it was just a dream. Let's go. Let's roll the stone in place.

PAUSE for reflection:

READER 5

I AM MARY MAGDALEN.

How I dread facing the day! When I woke up this morning I thought maybe the events of Friday were just a terrible nightmare. But, no! The nightmare cannot go away. I must go to the tomb today. I feel empty and my heart is heavy. How will I go on?

I have my spices. I must hurry. It is the only way left for me to serve him at this time. I must go to the tomb. If only I understood. The love I felt in his presence, the joy and the peace he brought to me, will stay with me for as long as I live. It was real! He was real!

But why? Why did Jesus insist on going to Jerusalem? We warned him against it. If he hadn't gone, maybe it would all be like it was before. I could still be near him. We could all be near him. I secretly hoped that he would do for himself what he did for Lazarus. "I am the resurrection," he said. What can it mean? How can he be the resurrection? He is dead. He is in the tomb.

What's this? The stone is moved. Have Joseph and Nicodemus been back? What? He is gone! They have stolen the body. What will I do? I must leave and tell Peter and John. I must tell them all. We will find him. "Oh, God! If you had been with us, none of this would have happened. Yet, I will believe. I will believe that someday, somehow, I will see your glory manifested in my Lord. I will believe. I must believe."

PAUSE to reflect:

SHARE any reflections you may have from the readings. Who are you in the drama of the crucifixion?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Allow each participant time to reverence the crucifix and pray silently.

SONG: You Gather in the Outcast – Scot Crandal YouTube

You gather in the outcast, the wretched and the sore.
From every street and city, from every home we pour.
You lay your hands upon us, you healed the wounded soul.
You raised the crushed, disheartened, you make the broken whole.

You dwell among the lowly, the poor and those who mourn.
To you we bring the suffering, to you we bring the torn.
You meet us with compassion, you mend the hurt we bring.
You give us hope and harbor, you make the sad heart sing.

You shoulder all the burdened, the fallen and the lost.
For you none is too heavy, for you, no bar the cost.
Your care is never wearied, your love is never still.
Your watch for us unsleeping, unwavering your will.

You welcome all the hungry, the thirsty and the weak.
In you we find all fullness, in you is what we seek.
You lay the feast before us, you bid us come and eat.
But, oh, before you serve us, you kneel and wash our feet.

* Prayer service adapted from an article:

They Were There: Reflections on the Way of the Cross - by Anthony Gilles