

◆ MELROSE UNITED CHURCH ◆

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◆ Friday April 2, 2021 ◆
Good Friday Service

MELROSE UNITED CHURCH
congregational responses are in **boldface type**

◆ **GATHERING** ◆

PRELUDE – Etude in D Minor
Imogen Clase, piano

S. Heller

OPENING HYMN – *O Come and Mourn With Me Awhile* VU 136

*1 O come and mourn with me awhile;
O come now to the Saviour's side;
O come, together let us mourn:
Jesus, our Love, is crucified.*

*2 Have we shed no tears to shed for him,
while soldiers scoff and foes deride?
Ah! Look how patiently he hangs:
Jesus, our Love, is crucified.*

*3 Seven times he spoke, seven words of love;
and all three hours his silence cried
for mercy on the souls of all;
Jesus, our Love, is crucified.*

*4 O love of God! O sin-filled world!
In this dread act your strength is tried;
and victory remains with love:
Jesus, our Love, is crucified.*

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: The Light of Christ has entered our homes. It surrounds us.

**All: We come, battered and bruised, alone and confused. We
look for the light.**

One: It seeks us out, in whatever state we find ourselves in.

All: This light which gets extinguished today, will resume, it will go on.

The light of Christ, no matter how horrific humanity behaves, cannot be cast aside.

....Christ candle is lit.....

HYMN - Beneath *The Cross of Jesus*

VU 135

*1 Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand:
the shadow of a mighty rock
within a weary land,
a home within the wilderness,
a rest upon the way,
from the burning of the noontide heat
and the burden of the day.*

*2 Upon the cross of Jesus
my eyes at times can see
the very dying form of one
who suffered there for me;
and from my smitten heart with tears
two wonders I confess,
the wonder of his glorious love,
and my unworthiness.*

*3 I take, O cross, your shadow
for my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than
the sunshine of his face;
content to let the world go by,
to know no gain nor loss,
my sinful self my only shame,
my glory all, the cross.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Surely God is in this place.

All: Help me notice.

One: Never do we notice God's presence more than today – this day we call "Good."

All: Help me notice.

One: Nowhere do our hearts break more than today – this day we call "Good."

All: Nowhere do we experience the power of love more than today – this day we call "Good."

One: We bless God that we can come to this place in the sadness of our living, and even here, find love.

All: As we wait with a dear one for the kindness of death to arrive. We come to worship God.

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

Eternal God, we have come to honour Jesus Christ. It is a day of remembering and holding fast to truths of faithful living. May this sacred time evoke a deep sense of awe. Let not our heartache overshadow the majesty of your everlasting love. As we imagine the pain that this day brought to you, we can only marvel at the depth of your love for us. For it was to save us that you sent Jesus to face the worst within humanity. For it was to heal us that Jesus was battered. For it was to give us life that Jesus was overwhelmed by death. Our hearts are grateful because in this love, we know forgiveness and we know new life. In Jesus' name we pray.

ASSURANCE OF GRACE

Note: A suggestion for another way to handle Assurance of Forgiveness – Rather than we confess and God sets aside God's wrath and forgives, we begin by being assured that God longs for a loving relationship, and

that we acknowledge that Jesus did not come to change God's mind about us, rather Jesus came to change our minds about God.

One: Jesus' words from the cross were not words of condemnation, but of forgiveness: "Father, forgive them," he pleaded. The God who has heard Jesus' words on our behalf has surely granted us pardon. Thanks be to God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (said together)

I see you hanging on that cross, Jesus, and you have crucifixion neighbours, two convicted criminals.

I see you hanging on that cross, Jesus, and note that two are political prisoners put away by a corrupt regime and conveniently forgotten. We remember Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor and commend them to you for justice.

There is a transgender young person, in B.C. whose father is trying to prevent his gender altering treatment. These young people are bullied and shunned for their nonconformity to rigid male/female standards. We know you open your heart to them, help us to open our hearts as well.

There is a number of sexually abused women whose continued employment depends on their abuser, and others who have not spoken out when it happened, for fear of not being believed. Our systems have turned a blind eye for too long. We pray that vulnerable women may feel respected and heard.

There is a refugee family in a Kenyan camp who have waited 20 years for a country to call home. They are not alone. There are millions of displaced people all over the world who do not have the joy and comfort of a roof over their heads. Compassionate God, help us to find a way to make this right.

You spoke reassuring words to the two criminals beside you, Jesus. What reassuring words would you have for your

neighbours today? What words would you have for us today as those who seek to notice these neighbours?

We wonder.....

A TIME FOR CHILDREN AND THE CHILD WITHIN US

Story: The Day Jesus Died

◆ SERVICE OF THE WORD ◆

Reader: Ian Brisbin

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

One: This day is a Holy Day, and so we come before you, O God, to find ways by which we may live your message of hope and goodwill. We seek eternal truths of your message even as we struggle with the challenges that it brings. Be present with us in your word today, as we continue to search for ways to be both a faithful and faith-filled people. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

WISDOM OF ISRAEL: Isaiah 52:13-53:12 - The Suffering Servant

One: See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as there were many who were astonished at him – so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals – so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For 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. He 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.

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But 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. All 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. He 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. By 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. They 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.

Yet 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. Out 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. Therefore 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.

One: The Word of the Lord!

All: Thanks be to God!

REFLECTION: Despised and Suffering! - Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

Interpretations of this passage are difficult and controversial. There are scholars who believe it was written with Jesus in mind. There is the interpretation that the "servant" and Jesus were examples of patient endurance in the face of injustice. 1 Peter takes up the astonishing position that the "servant" sets up an example of suffering, to infer that slaves should obey their masters, regardless of whether they are harsh or gentle, in the same manner that Jesus took on his suffering as an example for all. I expect if you were a slave owner, you would be happy with that biblical interpretation.

Some said that Christ's suffering was necessary and redemptive. Others have said that the "suffering servant," without worldly power or attractiveness, symbolizes Israel's plight as a captive nation. To understand the context of the passage within its time frame, one has to remember that "scapegoating" was a manner of practice. The priests of the high temple would take a "goat" as a symbol of the corporate sins of all, and sacrifice it for the removal of sin. Many came to interpret Jesus' death on the cross, as a "scapegoating," taking on to himself, the sins of the world, so that others might be sin-free.

Perhaps, we should question how our role of categorizing people into "despised and rejected," labelling and ignoring homeless, refugees, and "black hoodlums," contributes to the disparate

divisions of societal injustices. We may be momentarily consumed with a degree of concern for the plight of confined and tortured political prisoners, but we quickly move on. Many in our world are the recipients of unjust treatment and other afflictions, and we are quick to flag them as being responsible for their own suffering.

Isaiah tells us that God is the very one who turns attention to the “suffering servant.” It is a comforting reassurance that God does not turn away from the downtrodden. There is also an element of shifting blame onto the rest of us. There is some truth in that, the “suffering servant” suffers, not because of his own action, but because of ours. Our ability to inflict pain and wilful destruction, and our denial of need, and careless silence, allow the suffering to continue. We turn a blind eye to the one who is disfigured and in doing so, a mirror is held up to expose our own blemished souls.

The servant is silent; He raises no protest; His voice is absent from the experiences of those who would have us hear how we fall short, ignoring the plight of others.

The song of Isaiah was written for another people in another time, but Christians have appropriated it for their own, as an astonishing parallel for the life of Jesus. It matters not whether you believe it was a foretelling of the life of the Messiah to come, or a referral to the nation of Israel in exile, what does stand out, is the model for the church individually and collectively to be God’s faithful servant. The “suffering servant” encourages us to look closer for a model of discipleship that brings about God’s redemption in every generation. Amen

PSALM: Psalm 22 - Have you Forsaken Me?

One: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

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

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

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

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

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

All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

“Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver – let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”

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

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

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

Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and
roaring lion.

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;

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

For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles
me. My hands and feet have shriveled;

I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me;
they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my
clothing they cast lots.

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

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

Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the
wild oxen you have rescued me.

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

You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of
Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of
Israel!

For 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.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my
vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall
praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to
the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship
before him.

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

To 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.

Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told
about the Lord,

and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying
that he has done it.

HYMN - *O Sacred Head*

VU 145

*1 O sacred head, sore wounded,
with grief and shame weighed down,
now scornfully surrounded
with thorns, thine only crown:
how art thou pale with anguish,
with sore abuse and scorn;*

*how does that visage languish
which once was bright as morn!*

GOSPEL: John 18:1- 24 - Betrayal, Arrest, Visit to High Priest,
Peter's First Denial and the High Priests Questions

One: After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him.

First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one

who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people. Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself. Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

HYMN – *O Sacred Head*

VU 145

*2 Thy grief and bitter passion
were all for sinners' gain;
mine, mine was the transgression,
but thine the cruel pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Saviour,
turn not from me thy face;*

*but look on me with favour,
and grant to me thy grace.*

John 18: 25 - 40 Peter's 2nd and 3rd denials, followed by the trial

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.) Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from

here." Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

HYMN - *O Sacred Head*

VU 145

*3 What language shall I borrow
to thank thee, dearest friend,
for this thy dying sorrow,
thy pity without end?
O make me thine forever;
and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
outlive my love to thee.*

John 19: 1 - 27 - Sentence to Death and the Crucifixion

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them,

“Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.” Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.” When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” They cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.”

Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.

Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was

crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written." When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." 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. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with

him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

One: The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ

All: Praise to you, O Christ!

HYMN - O Sacred Head

VU 145

*4 Be near me when I am dying,
O show thy cross to me;
and for my succour flying,
come, Lord, to set me free.
These eyes, new faith receiving,*

*from thee shall not remove,
for all who die believing,
die safely through thy love.*

REFLECTION: It is Finished! - John 18:1 – 19:42

This is a long and difficult passage to read. We, as spectators, many generations removed, are forced to sit through a crime unfolding of horrendous proportions. The man we have come to know and love as part of God's very own self, has been betrayed, sent to trial, misrepresented, castigated for his good work, and found guilty on a trumped-up charge. His sentence for bringing God's love to those on the fringe of society, is to be brutally put to death.

Those closest to him, his friends, his disciples that hung on his every word, ran in the face of fear. They left him alone to face his accusers, to feel the impact of the nails, the tear of the thorns, the bite of the lash. It is so easy for us to judge, from the comfort of our homes, far removed from the side of the hill, from the scene of torture. Were we to be there, in the moment of unfolding drama, would you, or I have done anything different?

Jesus said the greatest honour is for one to lay down his life for a friend. Had his friends identified themselves as part of his group at the time of his arrest, they would not have lived to tell the story. The work of Jesus would not have come to be known. And they did, in fact, have an occasion to redeem themselves later, when they lay down their lives as a result of spreading his Gospel of Good News.

There is a very real sense of Good Friday unfolding as part of God's plan with all the characters in place doing their part to

bring it about. I used to have a great deal of difficulty in understanding this, as to how God could let this happen. But that is also our resounding response to all of suffering. How can a loving, all-powerful God let suffering happen to God's beloved people? When I came to fully understand that Godself became man in the personhood of Jesus, I was able to reconcile the cross and its redemptive suffering as a loving and all-powerful God who chose a way of humility and weakness to express a sacrificial love for all God's creatures.

God did not inflict this on others. God got into the thick of life's dirtiest moments and accepted this defining moment as God's way to indicate love. There is no answer as to why God "allows" suffering to happen to God's creation, there is only the solid acclamation, that God has been there with us, in our suffering and pain. There is nothing that God has not experienced first hand that we will ever face. Rejection, loss, brutality, whatever might come our way, God has been there; God understands; God is with us; We are not alone.

The hour approached; the end was near. The work that God had initiated and achieved through the life of Jesus, was now fully realized. It was time to go home. **"It is finished!"** said Jesus from the top of Mount Calvary, and his words still reverberate throughout time, and space to us here, on this commemoration of Good Friday as we gaze upon the love that radiates out from the cross. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

One: Ever-present God, today, we have full realization of your sacrifice and gift to us. We choose to make a difference to the need in our world. Take our small offerings in love, our

time, our money, all that we are, and use it to transform lives, so that your grace may be shared with everyone we encounter. Melrose thanks you for your continued support.

OFFERING MUSIC – Erbarme Dich, from *St. Matthew's Passion*

J.S. Bach Celine Cascanette, mezzo-soprano

*Have Mercy, My God,
for the sake of my tears!
See here, before you
heart and eyes weep bitterly.
Have mercy, my God.*

BREATHING INTO ETERNITY by David Lander

An end-of-life story from his brother-in-law, a pediatric oncologist in Florida

I was called one night to see 16-year-old Ella in hospital. Her mom was desperate, so we started chemo. In the morning, I spoke with Ella and said “there is no easy way to say this but you need to know that you have cancer, and we started treatment.”

“What treatment?” she asked.

“It’s called chemotherapy,” I answered. “Am I going to die?” “I don’t believe so, but you will feel pretty rotten.”

“How come you didn’t ask me about this treatment?” “Ella, you were in a coma, and your parents decided.” The treatment was indeed quite awful and the cancer advanced. The parents considered options in Mexico. I shared that we had experimental options but noted that I hadn’t talked to Ella about this. “They said, she can’t make her own decisions.” I thought I’d better talk to her.

“Ella, it’s getting hard for you to breathe. Your folks would like to give you a different chemo, but we would need a breathing

machine.” “It hasn’t worked yet, has it? I’m not getting better, am I?” “No, Ella, I don’t think you are.”

“Doctor, don’t give me any more chemo. I’m not scared. I’ll be okay. But can you stay with me?” “Yes, I can stay with you.” I camped by her bed for the next 24 hours; my right hand always clasping her left. She scrawled occasional words on her little blackboard: “no drugs. Not scared.” As she faded, she took on a look of acceptance, ease and grace, and in the end, I sensed something pass between us, as if she was shedding her dying cells into my breath, while I was breathing my own healthy cells back into her; as if I was taking something of her being in our temporal world, while she was transporting shreds of my earthly self to rest with her in eternity.

Many of us have been privileged to be on Holy Ground with someone who is passing. It is as if the suffering is merged into the suffering of Jesus and held in the infinite divine moment of God. The final breathing is indeed, submerged into the eternity of all.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION (concluded by the Lord’s Prayer)
Redeeming God, we cry out for the suffering of the world. We pray for the church, both near and far, that we may always be on the side of the oppressed and not the oppressors. We pray for the gift of faith that we may put our trust in you even in times of suffering. And we pray for those who suffer, that they may feel your presence with them. We pray for those who mourn, that they may feel your comfort; we pray for all who wrestle with their faith, struggling to know if you are with them, that your face will not be hidden from them.

We pray for our community of Melrose, for Loretta, for Vic, and all our shut ins. We remember Elizabeth, Flo, Dawn, Anne's brother, Chris' mother, Cheryl's mother, and all those who are still grieving loss of their loved ones.

Lord, we ask that you be with them in the ways that each one needs.

(Quiet reflection)

All: Our Father, who art in heaven

Hallowed be thy name,

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven,**

Give us this day our daily bread

**And forgive us our trespasses as we
forgive them that trespass against us**

And lead us not into temptation

But deliver us from evil,

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory

For ever and ever. Amen.

* HYMN – *Were You There?*

VU 144

1 Were you there when they crucified my Lord? (Were you there?)

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?)

2 Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? (Were you there?)

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Oh!

Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? (Were you there?)

*3 Were you there when the sun refused to shine? (Were you there?)
Were you there when the sun refused to shine?*

Oh!

Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when the sun refused to shine? (Were you there?)

4 Were you there when they pierced him in the side? (Were you there?)

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

Oh!

Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they pierced him in the side? (Were you there?)

5 Were you there when they laid him in the tomb? (Were you there?)

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Oh!

Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb? (Were you there?)

COMMISSIONING

One: Our Good Friday Service ends now. We have taken part in it from our homes. May it raise your awareness, make you stop and think about others who share in the suffering of Jesus in so many different ways. We have tried to be faithful to our friend, Jesus, to stay with him through his darkest hour. Today this is how the story ends. But we are people of hope, and so we wait, and we trust, and we pray, when we do not know the outcome, and we remember Jesus. Thanks be to God that you, God, so loved the world, that you became Jesus for us.

Go now in Peace.

BENEDICTION

One: May God keep us in our going out and our coming in,
In our lying down and our rising up,
In our work and in our leisure,
In our laughter, and in our tears.
Until we meet again. Amen.

THE CHRIST CANDLE IS EXTINGUISHED!