

HIGH DESERT UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERVICE

Centurion: The service today is based on the Stations of the Cross – a devotion that was developed in the Middle Ages by the Franciscans as a way of allowing people who could not travel to the Holy Land to walk where Christ walked on the day of His passion. By the end of the 17th Century many churches had stations, or stops, ranged at intervals along their walls – each with a cross and under the cross a representation of an event in the passion narrative. Nine of the fourteen stations are taken directly from scriptures; the other five come out of the earliest traditions of the Church.

Narrator 1: After the first hymn, we will proceed through the Stations of the Cross. Each station has a devotion wherein the narrator will speak, and then there will be a meditation or thought given from the point of view of the Centurion who commanded the guard on the day that Jesus was crucified.

Narrator 2: Following the meditation upon each Station there will be a prayer. Then immediately after the prayer, please join us in singing the verse printed in the bulletin. It is our hope that you will relax and enter into the experience of Christ's passion; that you may know the meaning of what our Lord has done for us.

*Hymn UMH 504 *The Old Rugged Cross* (vs. 1, 2 & 4)

STATION ONE: Jesus is Condemned to Death

Narrator 1: It is Friday, early in the morning. Jesus is brought from Caiaphas the High Priest to Pontius Pilate, the Governor, on trumped-up charges of treason and is condemned to death.

Centurion: The cries of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" still ring in my ears. The picture of Pontius Pilate sitting on the judge's bench asking the crowd of religious leaders and people: "Shall I crucify your King?" and their response: "We have no king but the Emperor" is an image that haunts me. It haunts me because it is the callousness and injustice of it all. The world is so often unjust. But mostly it haunts me because I see this injustice, callousness in myself. How often did I participate in allowing an innocent person to suffer? How often did I judge and dismiss persons as unworthy, as not due my care or compassion. How often did I take part in carrying out the judgment of others without question, without thought, without even a tear?

Narrator 1: O, Lord Jesus, when have I seen you hungry, or sick, or in prison, or without clothes, or alone, and not helped you? Help me to remember how you came to us, and how we have so often responded with words of condemnation or with silence. Grant us the grace to reach out to you when you next come, to reach out with words and deeds of love and justice.

Song Response

Were you there when they judged the Son of God?

Were you there when they judged the Son of God?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they judged the Son of God?

STATION TWO: Jesus Accepts His Cross

Narrator 2: A heavy cross is thrust into Jesus' arms. He is ordered to carry it to the site of His execution. Jesus accepts the cross. Carrying it by himself, he goes out to the Place of the Skull – Golgotha – to be crucified with two other men.

Centurion: He went out carrying his cross... like so many before him. Beaten by my brothers; mocked by my guard; bent over; bleeding. Horrible sight that people failed to even see as they gather on the streets to gossip and to stare; a sight, that we, his executioners, close our hearts to, lest we somehow end up feeling the pain, the burden, that the one who is afflicted carry. Humanity is burdened by many crosses: war, hunger and famine, greed and poverty, sickness and death. Everywhere you look there are people who bear those crosses; people who are afflicted; people whom we look at but do not see; people struggling – alone. This Jesus, he walked that road of sorrow, like many before him; alone. Carrying the burden that he did not earn; without a word, in silence.

Narrator 2: Lord Jesus, you accepted the cross; even though it did not belong to you; even though you did not deserve it. You carried the burden that belongs to us. Teach us how to bear each other's burdens.

Song Response

Were you there when he took the cross for you?

Were you there when he took the cross for you?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when he took the cross for you?

CHOIR ANTHEM: "Blessed Redeemer"

STATION THREE: Jesus Falls the First Time

Narrator 1: The cross is heavy and the road to Calvary, the road to Golgotha, the place of death, is long. Jesus, weary from lack of sleep, loneliness, fear, and the beating he received slumps to the ground. Soldiers quickly drag him to his feet.

Centurion: All around Jesus are the mockers and those who take delight in human misery. It is hot and sticky along the crowded little street. The air is filled with foreboding on this day of Preparation for Passover. These people should have their hearts on pondering the things of their God. Instead they are intent, in the name of their God, to do this evil that I too participate in. The world is filled with people who have fallen and struggle to rise and there are no hands to help them; only hands to drag them ever closer to their doom. My task was clear. I did what I had to do. My men did what they had to do.

Narrator 1: Lord Jesus, so much of our wickedness rises out of our selfishness and fear. So much happens because we know what we must not do and yet do it anyway, regardless of how it may add to your suffering. Forgive us and forgive all who mock and fear.

Song Response

Were you there when he walked the road alone?

Were you there when he walked the road alone?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when he walked the road alone?

STATION FOUR: Jesus Meets His Mother

Narrator 2: In horror, stunned, numb, Mary watches Jesus sway and stagger down the street. Her son, who glances at her in his agony, is being dragged off to his death.

Centurion: The look on her face. I could tell that she was his mother. Such anguish and pain as she looked upon him; he upon her. I could not tell what they said to one another in that glance; whatever it was she stood there in anguish, tears pouring from her eyes. What mother would not feel the agony of Mary's helplessness and sense of loss? What father would not care? Yet, in a world filled with death and destruction from wars and earthquakes, from riots and terror to drought and starvation, so many seem to have lost the ability to comprehend and feel compassion in the face of loss; unless it is our own.

Narrator 2: Lord Jesus, help us remember Mary your mother as she stood alone in grief. Help us to remember all the other Marys of the world when they suffer. May we be true source of grace and comfort to them; comforted as we are by you.

Song Response

Were you there when the Savior's mother cried?

Were you there when the Savior's mother cried?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when the Savior's mother cried?

STATION FIVE: Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry the Cross

Narrator 1: Jesus is faltering under the load. The soldiers fear that he might die along the way. They seize Simon of Cyrene; put the cross on his shoulders as he stands behind Jesus and make him help shoulder the load.

Centurion: It was the only thing to do. A thing we have done a hundred times. A perfect stranger, coming into the city, just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. I demanded that he be grabbed and forced to take hold of the cross. Was he reluctant? Was I reluctant? I longed to help Jesus, but I was afraid. I was relieved when the guards picked someone out of the crowd to help. I was ashamed that I could not bring myself to step out of character, out of my role, to help this man.

Narrator 1: Lord Jesus, we thank you for strangers in our midst, who often unwittingly, even unwillingly, show us what to do and how to do it. Open our eyes and hearts, enlarge our vision, that we may be the ones who help you and others to bear the unbearable load.

Song Response

Were you there when the Savior needed help?

Were you there when the Savior needed help?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when the Savior needed help?

STATION SIX: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus

Narrator 2: As Jesus passes by, a woman, Veronica we call her, reaches out of the press of the crowd and lovingly, gently wipes the blood and sweat from Jesus' face.

Centurion: I am stunned. A woman has done what no one else has done. She has reached out and helped the helpless; mopping the blood and sweat from his face. Even the crowd quiets for a moment. What she has done is so full of love and compassion and courage. Would that there were more like her on this earth. Are there? Anywhere? I fear that there are not. I know that I do not have the courage; even when I flatter myself and think that I have the heart for it.

Narrator 2: Increase, O Lord, our courage and our compassion. Help us wipe away every tear from the eyes of those who are oppressed; even when it may cost us to do so.

Song Response

Were you there, did you wipe the Savior's face?

Were you there, did you wipe the Savior's face?

Oh! Sometime it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there, did you wipe the Savior's face?

STATION SEVEN: Jesus Falls a Second Time

Narrator 1: Jesus falls again, despite the help of the Cyrene. He lies sprawled in the dirt, sweat beading on his face, mingling with the blood from the cuts on his forehead and the dust of these well-traveled streets. The soldiers, impatient and anxious to get over this job, roughly drag him to his feet again, cursing him.

Centurion: My heart wrenches; my stomach churns. I feel my own sweat upon my brow. I can only guess at the agony Jesus is in. The weight of the cross is too much and he is so very weak. He is bearing such a heavy burden, like so many in our world, and he has been forced once again to his knees; like so many before him and so will many after him. I wonder, how do the spectators feel as they watch this? Did they recognize their own pain? Do they try to hide that pain by jeering at him? Do they really know what is happening; how Jesus is enduring what he should not have to endure? How he is the victim of the evil that is in us all? I fear not. How welcome will the place of execution be; this road seems to go on forever.

Narrator 1: Lord, we have offended greatly. We have shrugged off the burdens of others so carelessly. We have neglected mercy and loving kindness. We think only of ourselves. Forgive us.

Song Response

Were you there, did you feel the Savior's pain?

Were you there, did you feel the Savior's pain?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there, did you feel the Savior's pain?

STATION EIGHT: Jesus Speaks to the Weeping Women

Narrator 2: A large crowd of women have followed Jesus' path to Golgotha. They are weeping and wailing in traditional mourning for this man, their friend. They are overcome by their grief and by their helplessness. Jesus says to them: "Don't weep for me but for yourselves and your children."

Centurion: They cry, these women who follow us, like I am crying inside. But our tears are not enough. They cannot stop the agony. They cannot feed the hungry. They cannot bring peace. They cannot stop this evil from happening. Jesus speaks to them, barely heard over their wailing. "If you must weep," he says, "weep for yourselves and your children." I can hardly understand what he means. Is it a word of judgment, or of compassion? Or something both? I think that it is the latter. That this man knows what is happening to him, and that it will be over soon. But that their suffering and the suffering of their children is yet to come. Oh, that there was another way. I know it in my heart. We must move beyond weeping. We must also act. But I cannot. I am powerless as this man bent over under his cross.

Narrator 2: Help us, Lord, in our tears to remember that it is not you that we must weep for, but ourselves. And show us what we may do to save our world, our children, from suffering as you have suffered.

Song Response

Were you there, when Jesus spoke those words?

Were you there, when Jesus spoke those words?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there, when Jesus spoke those words?

STATION NINE: Jesus Falls a Third Time

Narrator 1: No sleep, nothing to eat or drink since supper the night before, the interrogations, the scourging, the mockery; they have all taken their toll. Jesus falls again to the dust and grime of the crowded street of Jerusalem amidst the noise of weeping and heckling.

Centurion: This is almost too much. How much more will he have to endure? How much more will we have to endure? Jesus has become a pitiful spectacle, just as these crucifixions are meant to be. The laughter as he struggles to his feet is awful. How can they laugh? Can't they see that he is trying? Don't they feel any pity? I should talk. My patience is wearing thin. I long to get this over with and to go home. This is proving to be much harder on me than I would have guessed it would be. At least I can go home. This poor creature, this Jesus won't. He'll die, and from the looks of him, it may be sooner than normal. For his sake I hope that it is.

Narrator 1: Lord Jesus, you have put up with so much from us, and for us. How great your despair must have been that day. Teach us, Lord, from your example, so that we will not add to the pain of this world.

Song Response

Were you there when they mocked the Son of God?

Were you there when they mocked the Son of God?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they mocked the Son of God?

STATION TEN: Jesus Is Stripped of His Garments

Narrator 2: Finally they arrive at the God-forsaken place where Jesus will be crucified. People dump their garbage very near the place known as Golgotha. Hurriedly, roughly, his clothes are stripped from his back leaving him naked in front of the crowd: naked, exhausted and humiliated.

Centurion: We stripped him. Our job is to make sure that there is nothing left to a man to mark him as a man. To expose him. To humiliate him. To reduce him to the equivalent of the garbage that litters the shallow valley just below this hill. We did our job. Some of my men with more glee than others; wondering who would get his robe; a robe that despite the blood and the grime, might fetch a good price. We took his clothes; we took his dignity, much like this world strips naked hundreds and thousands of its people every day with its greed and its uncaring. Yet, in some strange way, I find myself caring more than I ever have before. I want nothing to do with taking his clothes; I will let the men gamble for it after we nail Jesus to the cross.

Narrator2: Dear Lord, we reach out and grasp greedily for so much, searching for what will satisfy us. We do not know how to let go of things and let you in. Even when we want to bring healing and wholeness, we get caught up in deeds that bring the opposite. Forgive us.

Song Response

Were you there when they stripped him of his clothes?

Were you there when they stripped him of his clothes?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they stripped him of his clothes?

STATION ELEVEN: Jesus Is Nailed to the Cross

Narrator 1: Roughly, contemptuously, the soldiers thrust Jesus down onto his cross. Holding him down, some sit on him, they pound the nails through his hands and feet. After he is lifted up, the soldiers throw dice for his clothing to fulfill the scripture: "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots."

Centurion: The ring of the hammer on the nails, the sickening sound of flesh and bone crunching echo in my brain. I'll never, never ever forget this. Somehow this one crucifixion is different than all the others I've been to. The torture, for that's what it was, has not stopped. It still happens every day. From utter brutality to the unkind word that flays the soul; it still happens. But the nonchalance, the ease with which my soldiers threw the dice beneath his feet as if nothing were happening horrifies me today. But then, well then it was a blessed distraction to hear them chattering and laughing; and to not have to listen to the sounds of weeping of the two criminals hanging on crosses on either side of Jesus.

Narrator 1: O God, our God, we have forsaken thee, fled from the crosses you ask us to bear, turned to endless games and sport to numb our pain. That day you did not flee. Help us to turn to you; to embrace you and the yoke you have offered us.

Song Response

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

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?

STATION TWELVE: Jesus Dies on the Cross

Narrator 2: The nightmare of pain and suffering, the agony of betrayal and loneliness come to an end. After three mercifully brief hours on the cross, suspended between earth and sky, Jesus dies. Choking on the hyssop dipped in wine he grasps out the words: "It is finished." He bows his head and gives up his spirit.

Centurion: The gambling didn't last long. So I watched Jesus die. It was unnaturally dark during the time he spent dying. But I saw enough, more than enough. I saw what the sign said that was nailed above his head. I heard what the passers-by said about him as they mocked him. And I heard the words that he spoke to his mother and his friend and what he said to the thief on the cross next to him. I heard all his words and I saw his agony. Indeed I was there when he breathed his last with a great cry. And I felt the spear dig in his flesh; the spear I thrust into him to make sure that he was dead. And I saw and felt the blood and water pour down his side, down the spear, down my arms, down his legs and to the ground. Violence and death; violence and death. I hung my head. I could no longer see for the tears that flowed, like his blood, down my face. And I could not stop the words that came to my lips as unbidden as the tears: "Truly this man was the Son of God." O why did I have a hand in this? How could I have let this happen?

Narrator 2: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. 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 strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death." (Psalm 22:1, 3, 14-15)

Song Response

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

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?

STATION THIRTEEN: Jesus Is Taken Down From the Cross

Narrator 1: He is dead. His body hangs limply, heavily. The darkness which had filled the sky since noon begins to fade. A wild rumor that the curtain of the temple had been torn in two from top to bottom was circulating. The soldiers yank out the nails to get him down. Everyone, including the women who had followed him and were looking on from a distance, stands back awkwardly, and watches the scene before them. Bleeding, broken, limp and heavy in his death; they place him in the arms of his mother.

Centurion: How did she feel? How did she feel? Mary, the mother of Jesus, how did she feel? With infinite tenderness, she gently held him and wiped his bloodied brow as her tears fell on his lifeless body. How did she feel? She shoos away the hands that would have parted her from her son. "Just one more moment," she whispers. How did she feel? Oh, why did I have a hand in this? How could I have let this happen? How can I comfort her?

Narrator 1: "I cry to you, O Lord; I say 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.' Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low." (Psalm 142:5-6)

Song Response

Were you there when they took him from the cross?

Were you there when they took him from the cross?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they took him from the cross?

STATION FOURTEEN: The Burial of Jesus

Narrator 2: Relatives and friends carry his body to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man who was also a disciple of Jesus. They lay his body, wrapped in a clean linen cloth, in a new tomb which has been carved out of the hill and then they rolled a boulder across the entrance and silently withdrew.

Centurion: The place where they laid the body to rest was in a garden. The garden seemed strangely silent and still as I watched them. My mind and my body were in shock. Images registered on my brain but I no longer felt anything. It was over. This Jesus, this one that I for some reason had called the Son of God, had died. I knew my life would never be the same, but what it would be I could not say. All I knew was that he was gone, gone. And I did not know him, and I did not help him. I went away and wept bitterly.

Narrator 2: Loving God, it says in your Word that you did not withhold nor spare even your own Son, but gave him up for all of us. Teach us what this means. Give us new hope. We ask this in his name. Amen

Song Response

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

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?

DEPARTING PRAYER

Narrator 1 and 2: Lord, when you were buried it seemed like the end of everything you promised and stood for. But it wasn't, it was only the beginning. As we travel today from the Crucifixion through the Vigil of Easter to the Resurrection, be with us in a special way to help us recall and reflect in our hearts who you are and what you have done for us.

Centurion: Father, send down your abundant blessing upon your people who have devoutly recalled the death of your Son. Grant them pardon and bring them comfort. May their faith grow stronger and their eternal salvation be assured. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

*Closing Hymn UMH 301 *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*

Benediction

Thanks to the following for leading our worship today:

Narrator 1: Sue Hinchcliffe

Narrator 2: Marie Donat

Centurion: Bruce Packard

Pianist: Lori Kottenbrook