

Glebe-St. James United Church
Good Friday April 3, 2026

Movement One | Gathered by God

Prelude Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love Tune: CHEREPONI
Ghanian Folk Song adapted by Tom Calvin
Organ setting by Robert J. Powell

Welcome Pam Fitch

Welcome to our Tenebrae service. The word “Tenebrae” means darkness in Latin, and this service of deepening darkness mirrors the darkness that came over the world at the crucifixion. As the service unfolds, candles will be extinguished as we remember the final hours of Jesus’ life and the reality of his death. When we extinguish the final candle, the Christ candle, we will experience the utter darkness which fell upon the world with Christ’s final breath. At the end of the service, we will depart in silence without a benediction, because until Easter Sunday, there is simply nothing more to say.

Land Acknowledgement

Call to Worship

Good Friday is a difficult part of our faith.
It is a day of shadows and death.

**A day when it seems like the sun will never shine
bright enough or warm enough again.**

It is a day of pain and sorrow.

**A day when hope dies; when the world
seems withered and barren.**

It is a hard story to tell.

But we will tell it. We will hear it, and feel it, and share it.

For it is our story, our hope, and our salvation.

**Jesus, keep me near the cross;
there a precious fountain,
free to all, a healing stream,
flows from Calvary's mountain.**

refrain

**In the cross, in the cross,
be my glory ever,
till my raptured soul shall find
rest beyond the river.**

**Near the cross, a trembling soul,
love and mercy found me;
there the bright and morning star
sheds its beams around me. R**

**Near the cross! O Lamb of God,
bring its scenes before me;
help me walk from day to day
with its shadow o'er me. R**

**Near the cross I'll watch and wait,
hoping, trusting ever,
till I reach the golden strand
just beyond the river. R**

Candle Lighting

adapted from Genesis 1 and John 1

In the beginning, darkness covered the face of the deep. Then God said,
“Let there be light.”

And there was light. And every day since, the light has come and gone.

The sun has risen and set.

The moon has waxed and waned.

The light is still with us.

In the beginning was the Word, which brought all things into being. What has come into being through him is life,
the light of all people.

The light shined in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overtake it.

When God made the light, when the light of all people came into the world, God did not send away the dark.

The darkness remains.

God created the night for dreams and clarity,
an exhaling of the light.

Let us enter this holy darkness to bear witness to the light of the world who was extinguished by violence.

Let us worship our Incarnate God.

Time of Silence

Hold silence for 3-5 minutes. Bell will chime to signal when silence is ended.

Movement Two | The Sentencing

Reading Luke 23:13-25

Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him." But the whole crowd shouted, "Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!" (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.”

But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

Visio Divina

Display an image on the screens. Lead the congregation through a time of contemplation using the following prompts, pausing for a minute of silence between each.

I invite you into a time of prayerful contemplation. Take a moment to let your eyes move about the image.

Pause.

Now consider, what stands out to you? Where are your eyes immediately drawn? What pieces of the image did you initially overlook?

Pause.

If you were to place yourself in this image, where would you be? How would you interact with what surrounds you?

Hymn When Jesus Wept

VU 146

Movement Three | The Crucifixion

Let us now turn to scripture, revisiting the events leading up to Jesus’ final hours:

Reading Luke 23:20-27

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him.

Simon of Cyrene's Story

Of course they chose *me* to carry a criminal's cross. Because of my dark skin and foreign clothes, the soldiers mark me as a man no one will stick up for—at least not against Roman spears. I'm not surprised by the crowd's silence, but it still stings. No matter how many years I make my Passover pilgrimage to this land, they'll never see me as fully one of them. Wherever I go, I'm a man torn in two: not Cyrenian enough for my homeland; not Jewish enough for Jerusalem. And now, I'm not even *human* enough for the Romans, who look at me and see nothing but a body they can force into service. Halfway up the hill, I'm not sure I'm going to make it. Is the beam getting heavier as it digs into my shoulder? But the soldiers' whips and spears warn me what will happen if I stumble or stop. For just a moment, the criminal whose cross I carry turns around and meets my gaze. There's compassion in his eyes, as if he's sorry for my pain—*mine!*—when we both know the agony *he* is about to go through! Just when I think my legs will give out, the criminal pauses, forcing the soldiers to stop too. At last, a moment of rest. He's stopped in front of a throng of crying women. What is he saying?...

"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me." He is comforting *them*, too!

Suddenly, I'm not so ashamed to shoulder a cross for this man, whom the poor and powerless love so well. A poor, battered, exhausted soul, just steps away from death—and yet, he radiates compassion. And yet, he is loved. Truly *that* is power, beyond Rome's wildest imagination.

Hymn Were You There?

VU 144

Movement Four | The criminal on the cross

Reading Luke 23:33-44

They came to a place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

Two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

The criminal on the cross – his story

Paradise. That’s what my companion and I are guilty of: intent to bring paradise to our poor, oppressed people, no matter the cost.

That’s not how Rome sees it, of course; they charged us with robbery and sedition.

We’d heard Jesus was back in town, that he’d ridden in like a king in challenge to Pilate’s grand military parade – and we’d thought he must be here to kick off a rebellion. After all his preaching about the nearness of God’s kingdom, and calling *himself* son of God in defiance to Caesar...what could he possibly be promising but revolution?

And how does revolution come about, if not with swords? So we ambushed soldiers to seize their weapons. Clearly, it didn’t go as planned. Clearly, Jesus never meant to lead an insurrection after all.

So here we are, about to die with him anyway, and I get my companion feels betrayed, why he mocks the man we’d pinned our hopes on.

Still, I can’t bring myself to hate Jesus. All the way through my arrest, my trial, my struggle up this hill, I’ve been pondering...

Could Jesus know a different path to paradise? A way to hold yourself somewhere between violence and passivity as you fight for justice? A kind of revolution that refuses to use the Empire’s weapons and instead creates its own tools for dismantling oppression?

I *shouldn't* have any hope left: not while hanging here between life and death, with no riot, no liberation, no second chance for me. The Messiah we thought would overturn Rome is slowly suffocating to death beside me.

Things are hopeless – and yet, absurdly, I hope.

Today I heard for paradise.

Tomorrow others will take up the work for the better world – until God's kingdom comes to earth at last.

Hymn Jesus Remember Me

VU 148

Prayer for Healing

When we follow in the steps of Jesus, we say yes to bearing his cross -

Not because there is any kind of value in suffering,

Not to prove our selflessness, nor because God wills it,

But because living as Jesus lived

Makes the cross inevitable.

So together, let us pray:

Jesus, when we side with you,

We side with all who threaten the status quo.

Assurance of God's Love

Hear this good news: the God of love listens to you attentively. "As the eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, as it spreads its wings, take them up and bears them aloft on its pinions. We are all listened to. We are forgiven.

Time of Silence

Let us sit in silence. Perhaps in this time, you may contemplate the joy of being free.

Gift of Music

And no Birds Sang

Douglas Wagner

Solo voices:

Frank Duern,

Maya Evans,

Martha Milne

Movement Five | Death

We have come to our final reading: Matthew's version of Jesus' dying moments.

Reading Matthew 27:45-46

From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah." Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Except.

There was Joseph of Arimathea, who gave up his own tomb to bury the Son of God. A member of the same Jewish Council that charged Jesus with blasphemy, Joseph reminds us that Jewish people were and are not a monolith. He voted against a

conviction; he risked safety and good standing to recover Jesus' body for the women who cherished him.

And there was ritual, the motions that carried the women through their grief: burial and the anointing of the body, with Sabbath rest in between, giving them space to mourn.

We end today in the space between death and resurrection, as the friends and followers of Jesus go home devastated and afraid.

We linger with them, because grief matters. Even when we know a joyful new beginning is soon to come, the grief and pain are still real and deserve to be heard.

To honour the grief of Jesus' friends, his mother, and the poor, whose lives he'd changed, we invite you to take a poem when you exit. I encourage you to take some time on Holy Saturday to read it, and to sit with your own troubles, fears, and griefs as you remember the day that God lay dead in a tomb, accompanying us even into death.

Special Music

The Next Right Thing
Solo: Julia Barry

Kirsten Anderson-Lopez and Robert Lopez

Blessing and Sending

And as we leave communal worship
To enter deeper into this liminal space between life, death, and life again,

Go with the knowledge that the Triune God –
Who fashioned you with love,
Whose Spirit breathes in and through you,
And who shares in our every sorrow and every joy –
Goes with you, even in doubt, even in death,
Even to the end of the age.

Go in peace, and in silence,
To wait with those who wait,
And mourn with those who mourn.

Amen.