

*We need not think
alike to love alike.*

FRANCIS DAVID 1510-1579



Good Friday Communion Service

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GOOD FRIDAY COMMUNION SERVICE

Luke 22 and 23; 1 Peter 3

We gather round this table to remember and re-tell the story of the last day in the life of Jesus. From Thursday evening when he shared supper with his friends, to the hour on Friday when ‘the Sabbath was about to begin.’

As Jesus and his friends shared the cup, so do we: remembering them and listening to the account left by Luke.

Reading: Luke 22: 17-18

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

In silence the wine is poured and shared.

And as Jesus blessed the bread and shared it with his friends so too do we: as members of one body in which his spirit dwells when love is at its heart.

Reading: Luke 22: 19

Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

In silence the bread is broken and shared.

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 those who 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.

Reading: Luke 22: 39-46

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial."

We pray that we may be spared the test.

The cup of suffering is too bitter, the sacrifice too great. We can scarcely imagine the agony of the choice: for comfort and a life of self-preserving compromise, or for integrity and a truthful death.

We pray that we may be spared the test.

And when a courageous soul struggles, in anguish of spirit, to be true, do we watch with them or do we sleep?

We pray that we may be spared the test.

(Silence)

Reading: Luke 22: 47-48

While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?"

This moment of infamy resounds down the centuries. Even those who don't know the story know the name: Judas Iscariot, the traitor above all traitors.

But we don't know why he did it. Why, with a kiss, he marked for death the man he had loved and followed from Galilee to Jerusalem.

But that isn't the point. Betraying Jesus didn't end with Judas.

Whenever we claim allegiance to the Way of Love whilst, in our lives, we follow the ways of selfishness, cruelty and greed, then we too betray Jesus, sometimes even with a kiss.

(Silence)

Reading: Luke 22: 66–23: 1

When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. They said, "If you are the Messiah, tell us." He replied, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer. But from now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God." All of them asked, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" He said to them, "You say that I am." Then they said, "What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!" Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate.

Who did Jesus claim to be? That we'll never know for certain.

Messiah? God's Anointed, commissioned and sent to proclaim the Kingdom that surpasses all kingdoms yet is found in the humblest heart?

Son of Man? The first member of a transformed humanity, sent to lead us all to renewed fellowship with God?

Son of God? At one with the Divine, as few – if any – have ever been, sent to call us back to wholeness and to love?

We must decide for ourselves, as Jesus intended. He never made it easy.

His judges made up their minds and condemned him; handed him over for torture and for death. But what is our judgement? He stands before us still.

(Silence)

Reading: Luke 23: 26-28

As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."

Even now we may weep for Jesus, staggering and falling on his way to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull. And even now he turns to us and says, 'Don't weep for me; weep for yourselves and your children.' The future

can look bleak, as it did for those daughters of Jerusalem. Many millions walk the path of suffering. Hatred, folly and destruction blight the present and threaten the future.

There is much to weep over.

We pray for compassion and wisdom, courage and resolve.

(Silence)

Reading: Luke 23: 32-38

Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

The story comes to its grim climax. Humiliation, mockery and cruelty: and in response, forgiveness.

The way is open for healing and reconciliation, if only we will take it.

But if we are to be saved by the forgiveness that is offered, then we must open our hearts and accept it.

May we be always willing to forgive. And may we always be willing to repent and be forgiven.

(Silence)

Reading: Luke 23: 39-46

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.

The redeeming death of Jesus wasn't some magic trick dependent on blood sacrifice.

Rather, innocent suffering and death for the sake of others challenges our consciences, our self-satisfaction and our selfishness. It calls on us to repent, to turn our lives around and walk the Way of Love in human solidarity as Jesus did, remaining faithful to the end.

One crucified criminal turned a deaf ear to that call, the other did not. He responded to Jesus with humility and contrition. He was redeemed, freed, 'bought back' by love and not by blood, though blood was shed. He was recalled from the depths where his comrade chose to stay.

We pray to be freed from our follies and betrayals, from the lies and self-deceptions that imprison us.

May we walk the Way of Love that Jesus walked, and be granted the integrity to be faithful to the end, whatever that might be.

(Silence)

(A hymn or piece of music)

Reading: Luke 23: 50-56.

Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for

the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Without hope the friends of Jesus laid his broken body to rest.

We pray that even where hope is gone, love will remain strong. Out of such love new life, new hope, will rise on some bright morning.

(Silence)

Reading: I Peter 3: 18-20a

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah.

What happened between the burial of Jesus and Easter morning?

According to ancient myth, Jesus descended in spirit to the dark depths of the cosmos. There lay the souls who had refused God's call. Now he gave them another chance: to be restored to fellowship with all transgressions forgiven.

May the fellowship of loving, faithful living have no barriers in time and space.

May wholeness and harmony be restored to all God's children. This is our prayer. Amen.

Music

O God, whom Jesus knew as a compassionate father, bless us as we part. Sustain us in the paths of faith and hope and love. Amen.

This church belongs to a liberal Christian and Enlightenment tradition which welcomes the loving, critical and enquiring spirit. It is founded upon an Open Trust which imposes no doctrinal tests upon its minister or members. We meet in the spirit which is exemplified in the life and utterances of Jesus, for the worship of God and the service of humankind. Anyone accepting this may become a member of this church. Visitors are always warmly welcome and encouraged to contribute to our church life. Our Sunday address is followed by the opportunity for dialogue, debate and even disagreement from the congregation.

We are a democratic, financially independent church and rely upon the generosity of our members, friends and visitors for our income. If, in this service, you have found food for thought and the soul please consider contributing to the collection. If you have been attending over a period of a few weeks and feel able to contribute regularly, the easiest and most efficient way of doing this is by monthly standing order. For taxpayers, by gift aiding your contribution, e.g. £25 monthly (£6 weekly) becomes £31.25 for church funds.

Everyone is invited to become a “friend” of the church. You’ll be added to our email list and receive regular bulletins. If you have been attending over a period of six months or more, why not gain a vote and a stronger voice by becoming a “member”? Please ask a member of the committee.