

Arusha Community Church
Good Friday Tenebrae Service 2020: Wait, Pray, Love
A guide for at-home worship

Tenebrae Procedures

The heart of this service is a series of 7 readings, each with a reflection and prayer, sometimes a song. After each reading, a candle is blown out. If you don't have candles, you can use jars or glasses and fill them partway with water. After each reading, empty one glass into a bucket under a table or somewhere out of sight. Water can be a symbol for life, and the empty glasses for emptiness. The pouring of water also reminds us of Psalm 22, which Jesus quoted on the cross. Verse 14 says: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me."

Readings and Music

You can choose to read or pray aloud or silently. If you are with other people, consider taking turns reading out loud. Whoever reads a section can also blow out the candle. You might read the prayers together. Pause as much as you need. Take your time. Headings in bold are to help you keep track of where you are in the service and what's next. Words in italics are instructions. Other words should be read aloud.

Much of this service is written in plural form: "we". Though many of us are worshiping alone in body, we are together in spirit, and so we pray as a community with shared intent.

There are links to videos of songs because this is the easiest way to share them. However, watching a choir may be distracting. Feel free to play the video and turn the screen off or away so you have music only.

Begin by lighting 7 candles or filling 7 water glasses (halfway is plenty).

Use a song to help bring you into a space of contemplation. If you are comfortable singing, sing a song you know by heart, perhaps one of the ones below. If not (or in addition), you can click on the link to hear the song Ukuthula. If you wish, you can sing along in English or Swahili (words below the link) or just read the words and/or reflect as you listen to the Zulu.

Opening Song(s):

Were You there when they crucified my Lord?

..nailed him to the tree

...put him in the grave

or

Yesu Unihifadhi hapa msalabani (Jesus keep me near the cross)

or

<https://singpatico.weebly.com/ukuthula.html>

Amani, kwa ulimwengu wa dhambi, (aleluya) ni damu ya Yesu huleta amani.
Ukombozi kwa ulimwengu wa dhambi, (aleluya) ni damu ya Yesu huleta Ukombozi.
Shukrani...
Imani...
Ushindi...
Faraja...
Amani...

Peace in this world of sin, (Halleluyah) it's the blood of Jesus that brings peace.
Redemption...
Praise...
Faith...
Victory...
Comfort...
Peace...

Introduction: *Read aloud if in a group*

Good Friday is a time of unknowns. Jesus had told his disciples he would die and then rise, but they clearly didn't understand. He was often speaking in parables and analogies, and they must have wondered, "What did he actually mean?" "How?" "When?" and of course, "What do we do now?"

On this Good Friday, we find our world in a time of uncertainty. "What is happening?" "How should we respond?" "When will it end?" and, like the disciples, "What do we do now?"

At the last supper, Jesus gave the disciples a new commandment: Love one another, as I have loved you. Maybe that simple statement was the best answer to all the questions they would ask in the days that followed. Maybe it's the best answer to all the questions we are asking now. In tonight's readings, we will see Jesus and his loved ones in times of deep pain, unable (or unwilling) to stop what is probably the most difficult experience of their lives. They can neither turn back time nor make it move faster. They **wait**. We see Jesus **pray** some of his most intense, desperate prayers. and in the middle of all this suffering, we see so much compassion and **love**.

Wait, pray, and love.

In our own lives, it can be hard to see hope. We might be in a Good Friday season for a long time. There is nothing we can do to turn the clock back or to make the clock move faster, so we wait. What we can do is bring all the feelings, all the fears, doubts, requests, hopes, gratitude, everything, to God in prayer. And we can love. Yes, even alone in our homes, we can give others grace in our thoughts toward them. We can say kind words. We can give our time, money, or talents in creative ways. Love cannot be stopped by the physical space between us. No matter how dark the night gets, nothing can stop us from loving.

Music: Kumbuka moyo wangu (Remember, my heart)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hlq30_wXBMO

(For this one, consider watching the video. It has images that show the feelings of the song and English translations of some of the words.)

Tenebrae Readings

First Reading: Matthew 26:36-46

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Blow out the first candle or pour out the first cup.

Reflection: Imagine the heaviness Jesus must have felt, knowing what was coming, and simply having to wait. He went to pray by himself but asked his disciples to watch and pray nearby. And they were just too tired.

Prayer: God, help us to know you are nearby as we wait and pray. Give us strength in our weariness to watch and pray with those we love.

Second Reading: Luke 22:47-53

While he was still speaking a crowd came up, and the man who was called Judas, one of the Twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

When Jesus' followers saw what was going to happen, they said, "Lord, should we strike with our swords?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear.

But Jesus answered, "No more of this!" And he touched the man's ear and healed him.

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour—when darkness reigns.”

Blow out the second candle or pour out the second cup.

Reflection: On his last night, still feeling the sting of betrayal from one of his closest friends, Jesus stops to heal his enemy. He doesn't condone the actions of the priests and officers—he draws the darkness of their actions into the light. *And* he has mercy for them.

Prayer: God of mercy, help us understand what it truly means to love our enemies. May we speak truth in hours of darkness and have mercy on everyone we encounter.

Third Reading: Mark 15:1-14

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.

“Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate.

“You have said so,” Jesus replied.

The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, “Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.”

But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

“Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

“What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them.

“Crucify him!” they shouted.

“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

Blow out the third candle or pour out the third cup.

Reflection: Why didn't Jesus say anything? What would he have said? Imagine what it would be like to be on trial and not defend yourself.

Prayer: God of mysteries, take away our need to constantly defend ourselves. Free us from our need to know all the answers. Give us wisdom to know when to speak and when to remain silent.

Fourth Reading:

Matthew 27:28-31

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Luke 23:32-38

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One."

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

Blow out the fourth candle or pour out the fourth cup.

Reflection: Have you ever felt like God is silent? Like you were waiting for God to speak up in self-defense and explain what's going on? Waiting under the cross for Jesus to perform a miracle and save himself? Waiting at a silent tomb? Have you ever felt like you were ready to give up on God, or wondered if God was giving up on you?

This song expresses the deep feeling of wanting to hear from someone beloved.

As you listen to the song, imagine the pain of the disciples waiting for Jesus to perform a miracle and stop the tragedy they saw unfolding. Imagine the words being sung by Peter, or Mary, or perhaps yourself. "Say something. I'm wondering if everything you've taught us simply ends here in a bloody death... I'm giving up on you. I don't understand. Yet I'm still hanging on to hope. Is it I, Lord? I'll be the one if you want me to. Do you have a message for me? Are you asking me to be your hands and feet? I'll follow you anywhere, just... say something."

Song: Say Something <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdnPAIFn32A>

Say something, I'm giving up on you
I'll be the one, if you want me to

Anywhere, I would've followed you
Say something, I'm giving up on you
And I am feeling so small
It was over my head
I know nothing at all

And I will stumble and fall
I'm still learning to love
Just starting to crawl

Say something, I'm giving up on you
I'm sorry that I couldn't get to you
Anywhere, I would've followed you
Say something, I'm giving up on you

And I will swallow my pride
You're the one that I love
And I'm saying goodbye

Say something, I'm giving up on you
And I'm sorry that I couldn't get to you
And anywhere, I would have followed you
Oh, oh, oh, oh say something, I'm giving up on you

Say something, I'm giving up on you
Say something

Prayer: Father, forgive us, for we do not know what we are doing.

Fifth Reading: John 19:25-27

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Blow out the fifth candle or pour out the fifth cup.

Reflection: How painful it must have been for Jesus to know he could not physically be there for his family and beloved friends. How humbling for the God of the universe, instead of doing everything himself, to ask his dear ones to rely on each other.

Prayer: God of relationships, in this time when many are separated from loved ones, show us ways we can provide for those who are vulnerable. And give us the humility to ask for help.

Sixth Reading: Luke 23:39-43

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Mark 15:33-34

At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

Blow out the sixth candle or pour out the sixth cup.

Reflection: Watch the video: *Waiting for a miracle* <https://youtu.be/6RdyEkSp6cY>

If you have trouble viewing the video, you can read the PDF document.

Prayer: *Pray silently, or pray your own prayer aloud.*

Seventh Reading: Luke 23:46-49

Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Blow out the seventh candle or pour out the seventh cup.

Reflection: Later, those same women go to the tomb, mourning. They sit, watch, and wait. Perhaps there is wisdom in sitting in the darkness for a while—not letting it take over, but allowing ourselves to feel the difficult feelings and ask the difficult questions.

Sit in the darkness. Pray, with or without words.

When you are ready, read and/or listen to this song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFNB2oVcNgg>

Do you who live in heaven hear the prayers of those of us who live on Earth?

Who are afraid of being left by those we love, and who get hardened by the hurt?

Do you remember when you lived down here where we all scrape

To find the faith to ask for daily bread?

Did you forget about us after you had flown away?

Well, I memorized every word you said.

Still, I'm so scared I'm holding my breath.

While you're up there just playing hard to get.

Do you who live in radiance hear the prayers of those of us who live in skin?

We have a love that's not as patient as yours was, still we do love now and then.

Did you ever know loneliness, did you ever know need?

Do you remember just how long a night can get

When you are barely holding on and your friends fall asleep

And don't see the blood that's running in your sweat?

Will those who mourn be left uncomforted

While you're up there just playing hard to get?

And I know you bore our sorrows, and I know you feel our pain.

And I know that it would not hurt any less even if it could be explained.

And I know that I am only lashing out at the one who loves me most

And after I have figured this somehow, what I really need to know

Is if you who live in eternity hear the prayers of those of us who live in time

We can't see what's ahead, and we cannot get free from what we've left behind.

I'm reeling from these voices that keep screaming in my ears,

All these words of shame and doubt, blame and regret.

I can't see how you're leading me, unless you've led me here
To where I'm lost enough to let myself be led.
And so you've been here all along, I guess.
It's just your ways, and you are just plain hard to get.

Sit quietly for a moment and breathe.

Final Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16

We have a great high priest who has gone into heaven. He is Jesus the Son of God. So let us hold on to the faith we have. For our high priest is able to understand our weaknesses. He was tempted in every way that we are, but he did not sin. Let us, then, feel free to come before God's throne. Here there is grace. And we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we need it.

Final Prayer: Jesus, we invite you to sit with us in the darkness. Teach us to wait with patience. Teach us to pray with hope. Teach us to love like you.

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.
Amen.