

Eternal One, silence from whom my words come,  
Questioner, from whom my questions arise,  
Lover, of whom all my loves are hints,  
Disturber, in whom alone I find my rest,  
Mystery, in whose depths I find healing and myself,  
Enfold us now in your presence; restore us to your peace;  
Renew us through your power and ground us in your grace. Amen.

It is so strange to be in this place of gathering with almost no one to gather with.  
It is so strange to be in this place where we celebrate together,  
we grieve together, we sing together, we pray together  
and our words and songs sound hollow without all of you here.  
But I try to remember what Elizabeth was sharing with us  
at the Catechumenate class last week.

We were talking about communion and how we believe  
that during the Eucharistic prayer the bread and wine are changed  
into the Real Presence of Christ.

When we eat and drink them, they taste and smell like bread and wine  
but the reality is that they are also something much more real,  
the body and blood of Jesus.

The bread and wine are accidents as Aristotle put it,  
not accidents in the sense of a mistake,  
but accidents meaning a nonessential property or quality.

We can't use our senses to detect the real substance of the blessed bread and wine.  
But we understand them to be the flesh and blood of Christ,  
given for the Life of the world.

So when I look out at an almost empty church,  
I think of it as just an accident, a superficial truth.  
That the deeper reality is that we all are here gathered together.  
That this building bears the indelible marks of everyone  
who has ever sat in its pews.

That, like those wonderful worn ruts in the entrance stones  
to some of the medieval churches in Europe,  
you all have created a Real Presence here,  
just as Christ is really present in the bread and wine.

Your real presence extends way beyond time and place  
to something much more eternal and longlasting.  
So, I can look out and imagine some of you in your places –  
Gene and Joyce there, Bob, over there,  
Janice, Jonathan, and the other ushers, back there.

One truth is that you are all in your homes,  
in pajamas or workout clothes or jeans, with or without cups of coffee,  
but the other truth is that you are here as well.

The liturgy for Palm Sunday can best be described as schizophrenic,  
which is also an appropriate word for the situation we are in,  
with its daily onslaught of both tragedy and courage, side by side,  
irreconcilable but real.

The story of the Passion is a bracing mixture  
of betrayal and cruelty but also heroic kindness and transforming holiness.  
Earlier, during the blessing of the palms,  
we heard the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey  
over palm branches laid along the road, to the sound of Hosannas.  
But that is only the beginning of Jesus' final week.  
The disciples cannot stay awake with him in the Garden of Gethsemane.  
There is Judas' condemning kiss,  
and the soldiers mocking Jesus on the cross.  
But there is also Simon of Cyrene bravely carrying Jesus' cross,  
Joseph of Arimathea offering his own tomb for Jesus' body,  
and of course, the whole point of the story,  
over and above it all is Jesus' own death on the cross.

It is this story which is the heart of Holy Week.  
It is this story which is the center of all our meditations and services this week.  
Jesus' sorrow and suffering are the focus of the Tenebrae service on Wednesday.  
On Good Friday, we enter first into the commotion of the scene on Calvary  
at the cross and then the silence of Jesus' death.  
We can't get to Easter morning without coming face to face  
with his suffering and death.  
It is this story which we meditate on, pray about, let sink into our souls.

The spotlight of Holy Week is on Jesus.  
And it is important that we keep that emphasis on him.  
It is his life, in all of its full humanity and full divinity,  
that we consider, embrace, relive.  
Our lives have hope and meaning due to his willingness  
to endure humiliation and to suffer unimaginably for us, for us.  
The Gospel of John tells us that at the end of Jesus' trial,  
Pontius Pilate declares, "Behold the man" as Jesus is led away to be crucified.  
Behold Jesus, wrapped in a purple robe, with a crown of thorns,

ready to walk down that road to death for us, for us.  
Behold Jesus, our savior, redeemer, and friend.  
That is the focus of this week.

But Jesus' suffering also inevitably reminds us of our own miseries  
and the miseries of those around us.

We imagine what Jesus' torment must have been like and then,  
in our oh-so-human way, compare that to our own sufferings  
and to the hardships of those we love.

The story is all about Jesus but it is about us too.

Knowing that he suffered more than we ever shall is a great consolation.

Knowing that he faced the same things we do – fear, despair, loneliness –  
helps, helps a lot.

He was not just some superhuman god, who was immune  
to the frailties and indignities of mortality. He was fully human.

One of the temptations of this story for us is to see it as a kind of melodrama,  
with exaggerated characters and an overblown plot.

The actors fall into categories – the good guys and the bad guys –  
and so become one-dimensional and unreal.

Those clichés keep us at a safe distance from really entering into the story.

But we are not meant to remain outside the Holy Week events at all.

We are meant to be drawn into them, so that we become part of the story.

To be drawn into the story is the purpose and meaning  
of all of the church events during Holy Week.

And I don't know a better way of being drawn into this story  
than by the Stations of the Cross.

During the Middle Ages, pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem  
to walk the way to Calvary as Jesus did.

Millions of pilgrims still do that today

as we normally do on the Fridays in Lent at St. Andrew's,  
moving around the church,

stopping at each of the 14 bronze plaques on the wall,

to remember each event on Jesus' final journey

and to reflect on what each event means to us.

But since we can't be in Jerusalem,

or even in our parishes,

the next best thing is to walk that way online, together.

To walk them, to pray them, moves us from being bystanders to participants,

draws us in and helps us to experience  
what it would have been like to be present then.  
The Stations have an uncanny ability to bypass our heads  
and to speak to our hearts.  
So this morning, we will visit just 3 of the 14 stations in our minds  
and listen to what they have to say to you and to me.  
At the end of each station, there will be a short period of silence  
to help each of us respond to the questions for reflection  
and to enter into the way of the cross.

The 6<sup>th</sup> station – Veronica wipes the Face of Jesus  
Jesus' journey is at times brutal.  
He has entered into the terrible experiences of rejection and injustice.  
He has been whipped and beaten.  
His face shows the signs of his solidarity with all who have ever suffered.  
He encounters a disciple, Veronica, who wipes his face clean of the blood and spit.  
On her veil, she discovers the image of his face – his gift to her and to us.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,  
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

What does the face of Jesus hold for me?  
What do I see, as I look deeply into his face?  
Can I embrace him, with his face so covered with his passion?  
The image of his face is a gift of himself.  
It is for me.  
In wonder and awe, I behold his face now wiped clean, and see the depth of his  
suffering in solidarity with all living things.

### *Silence*

The 9<sup>th</sup> station – Jesus falls for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time  
The last fall is devastating. Jesus can barely make it to the end.  
He collapses under the weight of the cross.  
His executioners look at him as a broken man,  
pathetic yet paying a price he deserves.  
They help him up so he can make it up to the hill to Calvary.

We adore you O Christ and we bless you.  
Because by your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.

I pause to contemplate him there on the ground.  
The brokenness that makes me whole.  
The surrender that gives me life.  
I pause to experience and receive how completely he loves me.  
He is completely poured out for me.  
As I treasure this experience, I express what is in my heart.

*Silence*

The 14<sup>th</sup> Station – Jesus is laid in the tomb  
They take the body of Jesus to its resting place.  
The huge stone over the tomb is the sign of the permanence of death.  
In this final act of surrender, who would have imagined that his tomb would soon  
be empty?

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.  
Because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I pause to contemplate this final act of his life.  
In solidarity with all humanity, his body is taken to its grave.  
I stand for a moment outside this tomb.  
This final journey of his life shows me the meaning of his gift of himself for me.  
This tomb represents every tomb I stand before with fear,  
in defeat, struggling to believe it could ever be empty.  
In the fulness of faith in the Risen One,  
I express my gratitude for this way of the cross.  
I ask Jesus, whose hands, feet, and side still bear the signs of this journey,  
to grant me the grace I need,  
to follow his way of abundant life. Amen.