

WE GATHER

[The ladder-garden with its pieces of wood across the rungs have candles (safely) placed on them and are draped with pieces of gauze cloth. People have also been given a foot-long, 2" wide piece of gauze when they arrived.
The worship space remains dimly lit throughout the service.]

Music for Gathering

Threshold

[accompaniment begins under the Leader's words]

Leader: Some days are just lousy and that doesn't even begin to cover it. The first recorded use of "guode friday" was in the South English Legendary, a text from 1290. Calling a day "good" was a way to denote a time of holy observance. What if even our lousiest days could be experienced as a holy observance of the reality that this IS life? Perhaps the "good news" in the midst of devastation is that God is buried with us in our deepest pain, wrapping us, holding us until we can move through that birth canal once again into renewed life.

"Good Enough"
[sung by a soloist]

What in our lives do we dream about for tomorrow, void of sorrow?
Time spent regretting decisions of our yesterdays, mistakes we made?
Sometimes we get what we get,
life disappoints us and yet,
God is still here and somehow, this faith is good enough.
[repeat with choir/congregation]

Calling on God

Based on Psalm 22

Leader: Let us pray together:

Holy One, Trusted Guide of our ancestors,
at times we feel forsaken.
You took us from the womb
and laid us in the safety of loving arms,
and yet life has thrown us again and again
into the loss of connection.
Gardens of joy grow silent with grief.
Be with us this night as we mourn what cannot be. Amen.

Opening Hymn/Song

"O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"
Chalice 202; ELW 351; GTG 221; NCH 226; UMH 286; VU 145; W&R 284

Thoughts about an Imperfect Life and Faith

"Even today, God is here and somehow, that is good enough."

Suggestion: Use all or portions of the "Mourning a Future Self" devotion from "Good Enough" by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Here it is in full:

…Perhaps you are in that place where grief is what makes the most sense to you right now. Because there is something that will now never be. There is an imagined future, something beautiful and dear to your heart, and it has dissolved before your eyes.

What is it that you grieve?

Perhaps your grief has a name. She is gone. He will never come back. The funeral is over, but the pain lingers. Perhaps you are grieving an event: an accident, an illness, a messy divorce. Maybe you are mourning a relationship that has come to an end with no possibility for forgiveness or reconciliation. Or perhaps you grieve for a marriage or relationship you still hope for, and work for, but one that has painted you into a corner.

Or is it someone close to you? Maybe you mourn for the relative with mental illness, a child who continues to struggle, or the loved one who will never be able to drive, work, or have the relationships that would make life feel full. Or maybe you lost an opportunity to do the right thing, say what mattered. Or perhaps you couldn't say goodbye.

I know that ache. It is a deep sadness that reverberates through our bones. We mourn not in general, but in particular. After all, love is in the details. It is, as Dr. Don Rosenstein says, "the loss of an imagined future." He is a clinical psychiatrist who works in a cancer center. An unexpected form of grief emerged for him when his son was

diagnosed on the autism spectrum. He had to grieve the loss of who he'd imagined his son to be. He had to give up on the fantasy of a future where he and his son could hit tennis balls back and forth. Of course, his son is lovable and loved. But Don had to mourn his expectations and root around for a new dream of what it means to be the dad of his *actual* son, not just the son he thought he might have.

Loss requires us to reimagine hope. But before hope comes acknowledgment. Let us count not only our blessings, but our losses. That might sound "negative" to people accustomed to leaning on optimism, but there are good reasons for starting with a deep accounting of loss. Honesty allows us a moment to pause and take stock *before* we forge ahead.

Acknowledging "this will never be" is the precursor to imagining what might happen next. Without it, we may inadvertently find ourselves trapped in what psychologists call "identity foreclosure." As psychologist Adam Grant describes, we can get tunnel vision. We commit and recommit to a single vision of the future, shutting down any alternate plans and the ability to adjust. You wanted to be a parent, but infertility made it too difficult. You hoped for a long-term partner by this age, but they haven't come along. You were excited to help raise your grandkids, but then they moved away. We are forever being kept from an imagined future. And without honesty, we cannot first mourn that loss.

When you cannot have the future you imagined, let the tears flow. Let yourself mourn. Pour out your grief in all its truth, with all your power, in whatever form comes. With words or songs or talking with friends. Long walks or screaming into the void. Let it out.

Tell God the whole of it. Even though it hurts. And especially the honest, angry parts. Anger is our soul's sentry, put there to protect our boundaries and the vulnerabilities we carry.

"To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven." (Ecclesiastes 3:1) There is a time to mourn. Let it take up as much space as it needs…

A TENEBRAE

("Shadow" or "Darkness")

John 18:12–19:42)

[use one, two, or several readers]

Leader/Pastor: Last night in our Maundy Thursday service, we gathered with Jesus in the Upper Room. There is only one other place in the Gospels where the Greek word used to describe the Upper Room was also repeated–the place, the room where Jesus was born. Two places where the dark birthed something new… the dark womb and the dark tomb. Tonight we continue the story that began last night in a tradition of "tenebrae" or "darkness," descending with Jesus into the depths of our own stories of grief, disappointment, and betrayal.

[The first candle is extinguished]

Reader: So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Judean authorities seized Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas; for he was the father–in–law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had given counsel to the religious authorities that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.

[The second candle is extinguished]

Reader: Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, while Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman who guarded the gate said to Peter, "Are not you also one of this man's disciples?" He said, "I am not." Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves; Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

[The third candle is extinguished]

Reader: The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jewish people come together; I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

[The fourth candle is extinguished]

Reader: Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him, "Are not you also one of his disciples?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the servants of the high priest, a kinsman of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Peter again denied it; and at once the cock crowed.

[The fifth candle is extinguished]

Reader: Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered him, "If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed him over." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The religious authorities said to him, "It is

not lawful for us to put any man to death." This was to fulfill the word which Jesus had spoken to show by what death he was to die.

[The sixth candle is extinguished]

Reader: Pilate entered the headquarters again and called Jesus, and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the religious authorities; but my kingship is not from the world." Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

[The seventh candle is extinguished]

Reader: After Pilate had said this, he went to the religious authorities again, and told them, "I find no crime in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover; will you have me release for you the King of the Jews?" They cried out again, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber.

[The eighth candle is extinguished]

Reader: Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him. And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and arrayed him in a purple robe; they came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again, and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him." The religious authorities answered him, "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God." When Pilate heard these words, he was the more afraid; he entered the headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin."

[The ninth candle is extinguished]

Reader: Upon this Pilate sought to release him, but the religious authorities cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; every one who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar." When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out

and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, and in Hebrew, Gab'-ba-tha. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. He said to the religious authorities, "Behold your King!" They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." They handed him over to them to be crucified.

[The tenth candle is extinguished]

Reader: So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew, Gol'-go-tha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Judeans read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. The Jewish chief priests then said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

[The eleventh candle is extinguished]

Reader: When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the scripture, "They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."

[The twelfth candle is extinguished]

Reader: So the soldiers did this. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

[The thirteenth candle is extinguished]

Reader: After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the scripture), "I thirst." A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished"; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

[The fourteenth candle is extinguished]

Reader: Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the sabbath (for that sabbath was a high day), the religious authorities asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken

away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled, "Not a bone of him shall be broken." And again another scripture says, "They shall look on him whom they have pierced."

The leader/pastor reads the next section while moving to the garden area of the worship space. The Christ candle goes with them (processed by someone else if it is large).

Leader: After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the religious authorities, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him leave. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who had at first come to him by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds' weight. They took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid. So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, as the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Wrapped in Cloths of Care

Leader: [from the Garden, addressing the congregation] And so we find ourselves in another garden, a place of burial. I invite you to write a word or phrase of something in your life that you mourn on your piece of cloth that you've been given and then wrap that around your wrist to wear out into the night. Perhaps even until Easter morning. In this way we draw in another bookend in this story… the swaddling clothes that wrapped Jesus at his birth and the linen burial cloths in the story of his death. Indeed, in the silence of the garden, the shadows of the tomb, the depths of our grief, remember that in the midst of devastation, God is buried with us in our deepest pain, wrapping us, holding us until we can move through that birth canal once again into renewed life. After the music and blessing, you are invited to leave in silence.

The Word in Music

"Silent the Garden; Silent the Tomb"
[choral anthem or SATB ensemble]
or
"Again and Again"
by The Many

A Blessing for When You Mourn What Could Have Been

Blessed are you, friend, sitting among the shards of what could have been. It is broken now, that dream you loved, and it has spilled out all over the ground. Blessed are you, dear one, letting your eyes look around and remember all the hope your dream once contained. All the love. All the beauty. Blessed are you, telling your tears they can flow. Telling your anger it can speak. Blessed are you when mourning is the holy work of the moment, for it speaks of what is real. Blessed are you, letting this loss speak all its terrible truth to your soul.

Blessed are we who mourn, saying let us remain in grief's cold winter for as long as it takes, that mourning might be to our hearts the gentlest springtime. Let the thaw come slowly, so we can bear the pain of it and find comfort at each release. *Amen.*

[the people leave in silence]

Worship Notes:

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"Mourning A Future Self" devotion and "A Blessing for When You Mourn What Could Have Been" from *Good Enough: 40'ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection* by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Used with permission. Purchase the book at https://katebowler.com/books/good-enough.

Music licenses: *[insert your church's licenses for congregational and choral music]*