

Invitation to Silent Prayer

Scripture says that while Jesus was on the cross, “From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon” (Matthew 27:45–46). We mark this time of darkness with a silent prayer vigil today from 12:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Below you will find prayers to pray, Scriptures to read, and artwork to meditate on during this time of silence. Take your time. Move slowly through the readings and pause when you see a † to reflect and pray.

You are welcome to remain as long as you like.

Opening Prayers

Blessed be the name of the Lord our God,
Who redeems us from sin and death.

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us.

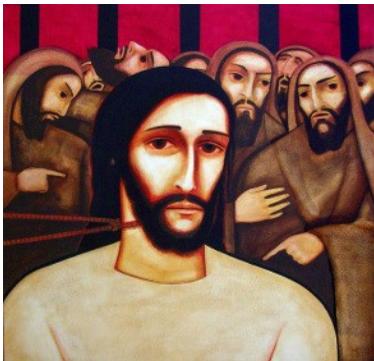
Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us.

Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us.

Blessed Savior, at this hour you hung upon the cross, stretching out your loving arms. Grant that all peoples of the earth may be drawn to your redeeming love, for your kingdom’s sake. Amen.

Behold the cross on which was hung the salvation of the world.

Jesus Is Silent Before Pilate



As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” He answered him, “**You say so.**” Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, “Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.” But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed. Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, “Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?” They shouted back, “Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify him!” So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, He handed him over to be crucified.

~ Mark 15:1-15

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

~ Isaiah 53:7

Jesus remained silent before his accusers, refusing to justify himself.

This amazed the Roman governor Pontius Pilate.

What about Jesus amazes you?

Sit in silence now, worshiping in wordless wonder and awe.

†

Jesus Is Silent While Mocked

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor’s headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

~ Mark 15:16-20

For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honor, my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

~ Psalm 62:5-7

Jesus continues to remain silent, even as physical mockery and torture begin.

He was treated cruelly, unjustly, and unfairly. In this sense, Jesus identified with all others who experience such maltreatment from others.

Ponder how his silence reflects trust that God the Father will deliver him and honor him. Where might God be calling you to similar trust?

Offer your silence to Christ now in solidarity with his suffering.

†

James Cone wrote in his book *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* that, ‘The cross is the most empowering symbol of God’s loving solidarity with the ‘least of these’, the unwanted in society who suffer daily from great injusticesThe real scandal of the gospel is this: humanity’s salvation is revealed in the cross of the condemned criminal Jesus, and humanity’s salvation is available only through our solidarity with the crucified people in our midst’.

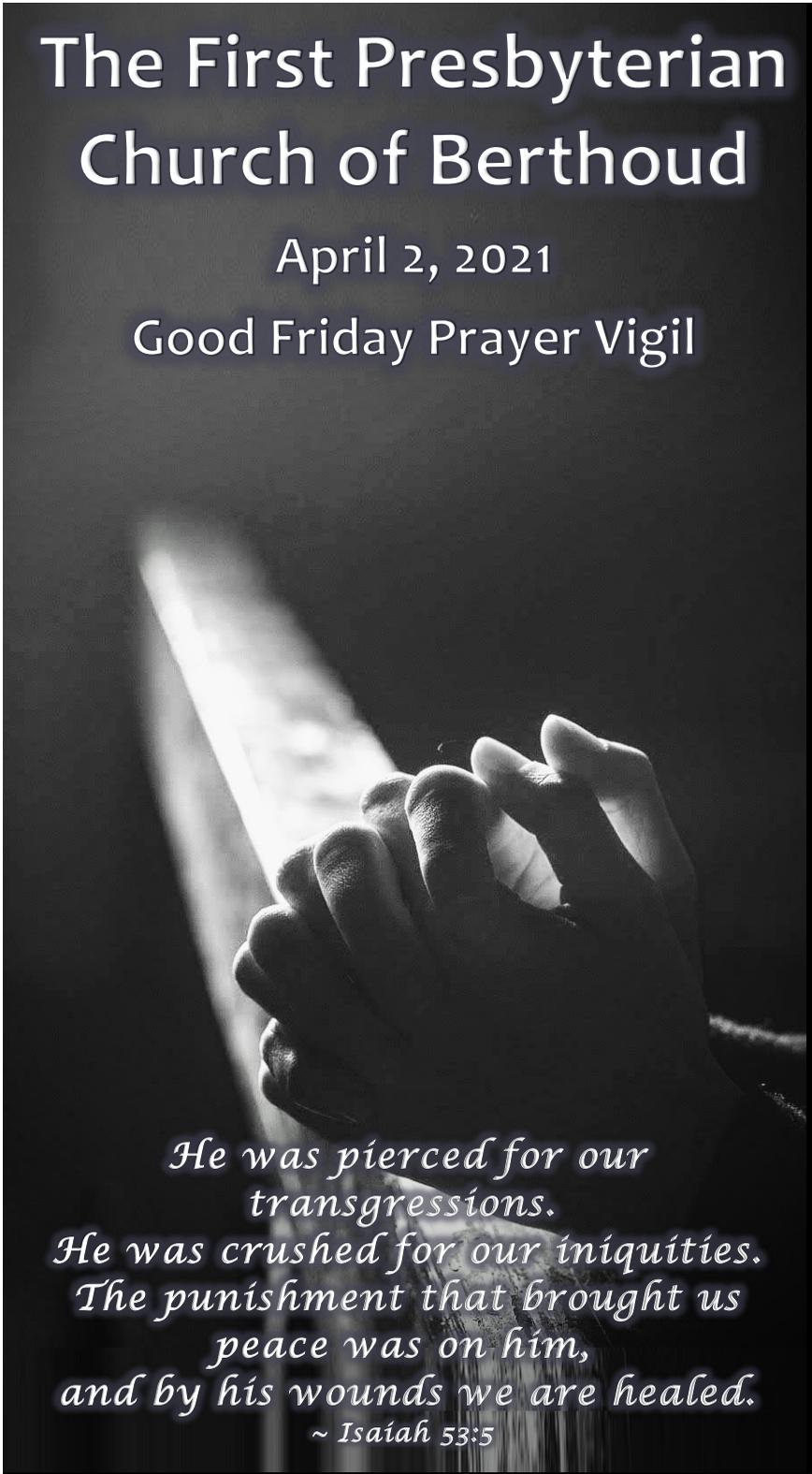
Who are the crucified people in our midst? How does Jesus suffer with them? Pray for them now.

†

The First Presbyterian Church of Berthoud

April 2, 2021

Good Friday Prayer Vigil



*He was pierced for our
transgressions.
He was crushed for our iniquities.
The punishment that brought us
peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.*

~ Isaiah 53:5

Jesus Remains Silent on the Cross

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

~Mark 15:21-32

They crucified my Lord,
and He never said a mumbalin' word.
They crucified my Lord,
and He never said a mumbalin' word.
not a word, not a word, not a word.

~ "He Never Said a Mumblin' Word"
(African American spiritual)

*For hours Jesus quietly endured the physical pain of the cross,
the emotional pain of continued mockery,
and the spiritual pain of accepting the consequences of all our
sin.*

*In your silence, offer to Christ the pains you are carrying this
day.*

†

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

~ Isaiah 53:4-6

*Where have you gone astray?
What transgressions, iniquities, and sins of yours
is Jesus bearing silently upon the cross?*

†

Jesus Breaks His Silence

Then Jesus said, "**Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**"

~Luke 23:34

Meanwhile, standing near 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 beside her, he said to his mother, "**Woman, here is your son.**" Then he said to the disciple, "**Here is your mother.**" And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

~John 19:25-27

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.**"

~Luke 29:39-43,46

In the Scriptures above, Jesus speaks to others from the cross. In the sixteenth century, Ignatius of Loyola recommended meditating by imagining that Jesus was speaking with us from the cross. In his *Spiritual Exercises* he says to "Imagine Christ our Lord suspended on the cross before you, and converse with him as in an ordinary conversation: How is it that he, although he is our Creator, has come to make himself a human being? How is it that he has passed from eternal life to death here in time, and to die in this way for my sins? In a similar way, reflect on yourself and ask: What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I do for Christ?"

†

Jesus Experiences the Father's Silence

About three o'clock, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "**Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?**" that is, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**"

~Luke 23:34

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.

~Psalm 22:1-2

O Lord, why do you cast me off? Why do you hide your face from me?

~Psalm 88:14



St John's drawing of 'Christ, Crucified', preserved in the convent of the Encarnación at Avila

This sketch of Christ on the cross was made by St. John of the Cross, the 16th century Spanish mystic who famously wrote the *Dark Night of the Soul*. Writing in the voice of God the Father, John asks those who gaze on the picture, "If I have already told you all things in my Word, my Son, and if I have no other word, what answer or revelation can I now make that would surpass this? . . . Fasten your eyes on him alone because in him I have spoken and revealed all, and in him you will discover even more than you ask for and desire. . . If you desire me to answer with a word of comfort, behold my Son subject to me and to others out of love for me, and afflicted, and you will see how much he answers you."

Where have you felt forsaken or abandoned by God?

Where have you cried for help and felt no response?

What might it mean for you that God has already answered through Christ on the cross?

†

Jesus Dies Into Silence

Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

~Luke 23:46

Charles de Foucauld, a French missionary who was martyred in North Africa, wrote this prayer as a meditation on Jesus' last words from the cross. As you read it, imagine Jesus praying it, then try praying it yourself.

"Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am

ready for all, I accept all. Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures - I wish no more than this, O Lord. Into your hands I commend my soul: I offer it to you with all the love of my hearts, for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father."

†

After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

~John 19:28-30

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

~Matthew 27:50-52

Death is marked by silence. The Word of God spoke, and then ceased. But the earth did not remain quiet. Matthew tells us the curtain in the temple was torn in two, the earth shook, and others who were dead came to life. As Jesus entered the silence of death, creation itself groaned in response.

In silence, contemplate the reality of death. Psalm 89:48 asks, "Who can live and never see death? Who can escape the power of Sheol?" The Apostle Paul asks, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24).

Every day I call on you, O Lord; I spread out my hands to you. Do you work wonders for the dead. Do the shades rise up to praise you? Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness? (Psalm 88:9-12)

†

The Silence of Burial

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.

~Luke 23:50-56

Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, is a day when God is silent. Scripture tells us only that the disciples rested.

After the resurrection, the Church taught that Jesus "descended into hell" (The Apostles' Creed) and "made a proclamation to the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:19). Christ's descent to the dead fulfilled the promise of Psalm 139:8, as well: "If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there." But while Jesus did this on the first Holy Saturday, his followers on earth remained perplexed. They rested. They waited, unsure of what came next.

As you spend the next day awaiting the resurrection, consider making Psalm 62:5 your repeated prayer: "For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him."