

Good Friday Self-Guided Meditation Walk:

For years we have gathered with our ecumenical brothers and sisters to bear public witness to our faith on our Stations of the Cross Walk – literally carrying a cross and reflecting on our world, how our faith calls us to live in the world, and on our own individual commitments to living our faith. While we cannot gather together today we can still think about our world and how we are called to deepen our relationship with God and, working together with others of common faith, to serve God and others.

If the weather is nice get outside for some fresh air, or perhaps use the different rooms in your home. Either way, please walk a path of your own making that will allow you time for reading the scripture passage and brief reflection at each of 6 stops. Following each reflection is a set of questions that will hopefully help you do some self-examination and deepen your relationship with God, as you contemplate Jesus' path from "family meal" to the cross.

Blessings to you on this Good Friday....

1. The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

Matthew 26:47-52, 57, 59-66

⁴⁷ While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." ⁴⁹ At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. ⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹ Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. ⁵² Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword...

⁵⁷ Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered... ⁵⁹ Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰ but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹ and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'" ⁶² The high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?" ⁶³ But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, "I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God." ⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you,

From now on you will see the Son of Man
seated at the right hand of Power
and coming on the clouds of heaven."

⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What is your verdict?" They answered, "He deserves death."

Reflection: It's easy, when we read this part of the story, to focus on Judas, on his great betrayal of Jesus. It can be easy to speculate about his motives and to condemn him as the worst sinner of all time. But we need to keep reading. We need to remember that in spite of all they had heard along the way from their Master Jesus, "the Prince of Peace" himself, the disciples still took his advice and brought swords to the garden – and one fell to the temptation to meet violence with violence (although not terribly effectively, as only the guard's ear was removed). Judas's betrayal was the most flashy, Peter's denial later is very well remembered. But other disciples were not entirely trusting in God's protection that last night on the Mount of Olives. Thus, it was not only Judas who betrayed their teacher Jesus. Standing up for Christ's Way of Peace, especially when that position is unpopular among our friends, is a hard choice to make.

Questions for Reflection: When have you witnessed to your faith with others who find faith unpopular? What was that experience like? What gives you (or would give you) the courage to witness to your faith regularly?

2. *Peter's Denial of Jesus*

Matthew 26:69-75

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." ⁷⁰ But he denied it before all of them, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about." ⁷¹ When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷² Again he denied it with an oath, "I do not know the man." ⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you." ⁷⁴ Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, "I do not know the man!" At that moment the cock crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Reflection: What would have happened if Peter had said yes? "Yes, I know him. Yes, I'm one of his followers." Would he have been arrested too? Would he have been tried and tortured and crucified too? Perhaps it was simple expediency that kept him silent. After all, how could Jesus' work continue if his disciples were all dead too? Maybe Peter was hoping to keep Jesus' movement alive with this act of denial. Maybe he was just trying to stay alive. Whatever was behind the words, "I do not know the man," they led Peter to repentance. It's easy to think we know what he should have done. But when it's our turn to speak up and confess our love of Jesus, or to stay silent, what do we do?

Questions for Reflection: Have you ever denied knowing or having a relationship with God? What helps you to build your relationship with God as you journey through life...especially through the difficult times?

3. Jesus Brought before Pilate

Matthew 27:1-2, 11-14

When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. ² They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus said, “You say so.” ¹² But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. ¹³ Then Pilate said to him, “Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?” ¹⁴ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Reflection: “The Paradoxical Commandments”

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.

Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.

Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds.

Think big anyway.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.

Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.

Help people anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you’ll get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you have anyway.

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Questions for Reflection: Jesus knew that what he was doing and teaching could win him enemies and lead him toward potential accusations and danger, and yet he did it anyway. Which of the commandments above is the easiest for you to follow? Which is the hardest? Why?

4. Barabbas or Jesus?

Matthew 27:15-26

¹⁵ Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. ¹⁶ At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. ¹⁷ So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, “Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?” ¹⁸ For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. ¹⁹ While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, “Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.” ²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. ²¹ The governor again said to them, “Which of the two do you want me to release for you?” And they said, “Barabbas.” ²² Pilate said to them, “Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?” All of them said, “Let him be crucified!” ²³ Then he asked, “Why, what evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”

²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” ²⁵ Then the people as a whole answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” ²⁶ So he released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Reflection: “Jesus was not a man *for* others. He was one *with* others. There is a world of difference in that. Jesus didn't seek the rights of lepers. He *touched* the leper even before he got around to curing him. He didn't champion the cause of the outcast. He *was* the outcast. He didn't fight for improved conditions for the prisoner. He simply said, 'I was in prison.' The strategy of Jesus is not centered in taking the right stand on issues, but rather in standing in the right place—with the outcast and those relegated to the margins.”...“Scripture scholars contend that the original language of the Beatitudes should not be rendered as "Blessed are the single-hearted" or "Blessed are the peacemakers" or "Blessed are those who struggle for justice." Greater precision in translation would say, "You're in the right place if...you are single-hearted or work for peace." The Beatitudes is not a spirituality, after all. It's a geography. It tells us where to stand.”

Fr. Gregory Boyle, Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion

Questions for Reflection: In your daily living do you feel like you are “standing in the right place” with Jesus, and especially with his care for the marginalized and outcast? If so, how do you maintain that position? If not, what would need to change about how you live, work and/or make decisions to align yourself more closely with Jesus?

5. The Soldiers Mock Jesus

Matthew 27: 27-37

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹ After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

³² As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; ³⁶ then they sat down there and kept watch over him. ³⁷ Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Reflection: "Proximity has taught me some basic and humbling truths, including this vital lesson: Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done. My work with the poor and the incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice. Finally, I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned."... "We are all implicated when we allow other people to be mistreated. An absence of compassion can corrupt the decency of a community, a state, a nation. Fear and anger can make us vindictive and abusive, unjust and unfair, until we all suffer from the absence of mercy and we condemn ourselves as much as we victimize others. The closer we get to mass incarceration and extreme levels of punishment, the more I believe it's necessary to recognize that we all need mercy, we all need justice, and-perhaps-we all need some measure of unmerited grace."

— Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*

Questions for Reflection: Have you had an experience when you allowed someone else to be treated poorly? How did that experience affect or perhaps change you? Where do you see an absence of compassion in our world today? Where do you see compassion at work?

6. The Death of Jesus

Matthew 27: 45-50

⁴⁵ From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. ⁴⁶ And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷ When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." ⁴⁸ At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." ⁵⁰ Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

Reflection: Jesus is in terrible pain and cries out asking why God had forsaken him. That can be a common thought when we are going through some of the most difficult times in our lives – a feeling that God caused our misfortune, that God has abandoned us, that God somehow doesn't care. And yet we read these words from Rabbi Harold Kushner, "God does not cause our misfortunes. Some are caused by bad luck, some are caused by bad people, and some are simply an inevitable consequence of our being human and being mortal, living in a world of inflexible natural laws. The painful things that happen to us are not punishments for our misbehavior, nor are they in any way part of some grand design on God's part. Because the tragedy is not God's will, we need not feel hurt or betrayed by God when tragedy strikes. We can turn to Him for help in overcoming it, precisely because we can tell ourselves that God is as outraged by it as we are."

— quote from Kushner's book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

Questions for Reflection: Have you ever had a time when you felt like God had forsaken or abandoned you? If so, who or what helped you to feel and realize God's presence in your life? How do you know that God walks with you on your journey weeping with you when you are broken-hearted, laughing with you when you celebrate, and holding you in God's great heart of love at all times?

Closing Prayer:

Loving God, plant the seed of your Kingdom of Grace within me. Grant me the courage to live and share my faith with others, especially those in my life, and who cross my path, who need to know you and your love the most. Grant me the patience to live in hope of Resurrection; a hope that even in these difficult and dark times, goodness and the light of your love will survive and guide us to a better way and place for all people and for your creation. Help me to trust, along with others who call on your name in common faith and bonded love, that following your will and way, and relying on your strength and power, transformation and new life will come to a despairing world, in the name of Jesus. Amen.