

Opening Music: *What a Friend We Have in Jesus Instrumental*, Music: Joseph Medlicott Scriven, 1855, Arranger: Bruce Ley, 2020.

Introduction to Repeat Podcast

Good Morning, and blessings to you wherever you are, and may peace be with you this very moment. I am Rev. Dr. Candice Bist. I am taking some time off during the month of August and September, but I wanted you to continue to have a podcast for reflection on Sundays. So, we are revisiting the five special services that were created last April for holy week. Perhaps hearing the passion story out of context, in the midst of a lazy summer morning, or in the quiet evening as the rain falls, you will hear it differently. I am hoping so.

There are three things I point out to you in this re- listening, three things you might consider and watch for in the story. Jesus' steadiness. The crowd's seeming power. And our required stand against the power of empire.

Throughout the story of the arrest, trail and crucifixion of Jesus, you will note the calm demeanor of Jesus. What is it that gives Jesus such peace and strength?

I think it is his absolute conviction of being held in the arms of God, no matter how things look from the outside.

When Moses was dying on the side of Mount Nebo and giving Israel his final blessing, as told in the book of Deuteronomy, he says

There is none like God. . .

Who rides through the heavens to your help,

And in his majesty through the skies.

The eternal God is your dwelling place,

And underneath are the everlasting arms. Deuteronomy 33: 26, 27 RSV

Moses had been severely disciplined by God. He had not followed a clear instruction he was given, and the result was that God had told Moses that for all his faithfulness, and all his many feats in leadership, he would nevertheless be denied seeing the promised land. And yet, and yet, Moses knows absolutely, without a single doubt, that he is held in the everlasting arms.

I think Jesus knew that too. And this is what keeps him grounded and steady. Jesus knows he is held in the everlasting arms. I hope you know that too.

In contrast to Jesus's steadiness is the raucous, angry, pressing crowd that howls for his death. The crowd, of course, is never to be trusted with truth. And just this week, the wonderful Maria Popova, who somehow seems always to be in sync with our podcasts, offers a meditation on the perils of following the crowd. Here is a brief piece from her thought, the link to the full version is on our website.

"Truth always rests with the minority ... because the minority is generally formed by those who really have an opinion, while the strength of a majority is illusory, formed by the gangs who have no opinion," Kierkegaard wrote in his journal in the middle of the nineteenth century as he tussled with the eternal question of [why we conform](#). Around the same time, across the Atlantic, Emerson fumed in his own diary as he contemplated the supreme existential challenge of [individual integrity in a mass society](#): *"Masses are rude, lame, unmade, pernicious in their demands and influence... I wish not to concede anything to them, but to tame, drill, divide, and break them up, and draw individuals out of them."*

The crowd howling for Jesus' death does not contemplate, consider, meditate, have conversation, pray, wonder.

It howls. It screams. It demands. Whatever it is in your life that behaves this way, no that when it is in control, you are not.

So, Jesus is holding steady. And there is the crowd howling for violence - and yet, in this, they cry out the truth, for they state:

"If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor..... we have no king except the emperor."

When we claim we have no king except the emperor, we claim we have no sovereign birthright, no power to bring about change, no resistance to the virus of hatred.

We claim we have no internal divine spirit as Jesus did and as we all do.

And when we claim to have no internal divinity, we are a slave to the violence others would press upon us, and worse, it would press on those less able to resist it.

Listen to the story again.

Watch Jesus.

Watch the crowd.

Listen to their truth.

And figure out what side you want to be on. Because there are only two sides to choose.

The side of the angels.

Or the side of The Empire.

You have to serve somebody.

Who are you going to serve?

Opening Music: *What Wonderous Love is This?* Music: American Folk Hymn, Arranger: Bruce Ley, 2020

Welcome and Introduction to the Readings

Welcome to this traditional Good Friday Service. I am Rev. Candice Bist and along with my husband Bruce Ley, we serve the Shelburne Primrose Pastoral Charge in Southern Ontario, which is a part of the United Church of Canada. I am hoping you are staying home as much as is possible, caring for your health, and trying to remain hopeful and compassionate with one another in this uncertain time. May the readings, music and thoughts here offered grant you a time of rest and reflection.

The story of the Passion of Christ is told in all four of the gospel accounts in what is known as The New Testament in the Bible.

The early church used Latin as their language of choice, and the Latin word *Passionem* means suffering or enduring...so the passion story refers to the last week of Jesus' life – from the time of his arrival in Jerusalem, through his arrest, trial, torture and crucifixion.

It is not an easy story to hear. But it is the tradition in the Christian faith, to read through this story every year on Good Friday. In common culture, Easter weekend, with all its references to new life, to springtime, to lengthening days, and to delicious food and an abundance of sweets, is irresistible as a celebration.

No so, Good Friday, though it is an integral part of the full Easter story. We tend to forget that in order to have new birth, time must be spent in the dark.

And it is a dark story indeed, for it is a reflection of the darkness within the human spirit, the poor choices that we have made throughout history, and that we continue to make today.

To listen to the story and not turn away, that takes courage. So, if you are listening to this podcast, I commend that courage and hope it graces you with illumination.

Though the passion story is told in all the gospels, it is the fuller, more detailed story in the book of John that we listen to each year.

You may remember that the disciples stumbled and fell asleep when Jesus asked them to stay with him.

All these years later, it is my hope that we may stay awake, even if only for the hearing of this dark tale....

Let us begin with prayer, that our time be especially sanctified.

Gracious God, Holy One, Creator of all Beauty and Joy,
Companion of all Sorrow and Trial....

We gather together this morning to hear again the ancient story of Jesus' trail and arrest and crucifixion.

We will listen to the story as it unfolds with quiet hearts and open spirits that you might whisper your deep secrets to us in some new and astonishing way.....

Encourage us be restful as we listen, not distracted by thoughts other than yours,
and may we thus be filled with the grace that is your essence,
and that allows us to see one another with the eyes of the beloved....

Grant us courage.

Grant us humility.

We pray as always in the name of love, and for those who see that love in the face of a man called Jesus of Nazareth, we pray in his name also. Amen.

Musical Interlude: *Minor Variation, What Wonderous Love is This?* Music: American Folk Hymn, Arranger: Bruce Ley, 2020

1st Reading: John 18: 1 – 27

Jesus went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they

stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.” This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, “I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.” Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, “You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. Jesus answered, “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.” When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” Jesus answered, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, “You are not also one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

Musical Interlude, *Variations*, Bruce Ley

2nd Reading: John 18: 28 – 40

Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate’s headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?” They answered, “If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.” The Jews replied, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death.” (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, “I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” They shouted in reply,

“Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a bandit.

Musical Interlude: *Go to Dark Gethsemane*, Music: Richard Redhead, 1853. Arranger: Bruce Ley, 2020

3rd Reading: John 19: 1 – 16

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and striking him on the face. Pilate went out again and said to them, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him.” So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!”

When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.”

Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters^[a] again and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to 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, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, **“If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.”**

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat^[b] on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew^[c] Gabbatha. Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! **Crucify him!**" Pilate asked them, "**Shall I crucify your King?**" The chief priests answered, "**We have no king but the emperor.**" Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

Musical Interlude: *Where You There When They Crucified My Lord?* Music/Lyrics: African American Spiritual Arranger: Bruce Ley, 2020

Reflection

This particular piece of scripture has caused much anti-Semitism over the years born of exactly the kind of faulty thinking Jesus tried to realign in his lifetime. For Christians to read into this story a condemnation of the Jewish faith which is much to be honoured and is an integral part of the Christian faith story, is to miss the point entirely. And in doing so, to release us from all culpability of our own less than exemplary behavior. The Holocaust was a cry to crucify, as was the Gulag, the Nanking Massacre, the Armenian, Indonesian and Rwandan Genocides, the Battle of Somme, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Holodomor – all cries to crucify – and you will be able to name your own cries that echo even this day.

No, this passage is not about condemning a certain religious group, or religion in particular, for all those gathered in the story were of the Jewish faith, including Jesus. And the Romans had their own deities and faith framework in which they lived and worshiped. The cry to crucify Jesus, embedded as it is in the passion story, is the cry that has echoed all through time, and can still be heard today.

The cry to crucify is the cry to kill what is lovely and tender and alive,
what is struggling to emerge,
what is true in a way that challenges what we hold as truth,
what is noble though it may be difficult.

The cry to crucify is the cry to kill what is unfolding and not fully known....
and to replace it with what is self-serving,
what is expedient and impatient with nuance,
what is narrow in thought and closed to new awakenings.

The cry to crucify is the cry to cling what is known,

without acknowledging the vast richness that is yet to be discovered in our own individual innate wisdom and the marvelous collective dance that may ensue when we share freely and generously those gifts of discovery with one another.

The cry to crucify is the cry to deny our unity at the same time it denigrates our uniqueness.

In response to that cry, Pilot asks again, just for clarity - and I hear him ask in a kind of incredulity, with the hope that in asking just one more time the answer will be different - **Shall I crucify your king?** He is asking the larger question we are asked every moment of every day, with every decision we make, with every choice that is open to us. It is a question asked to all people because the question asks: who do you serve? Are you sure that is who you want to serve?

As our very own poet Laureate Bob Dylan articulated some years ago now,

*“You’re gonna have to serve somebody, yes you are
You’re gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord
But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”*

And the choice that was made in our passion story, was the choice to serve empire, to be rid of that which questioned the status quo, that dared to examine the way things have always been, and wondered if that was the way they always did need to be.....

Here we are in the spring of 2020 in the midst of the Cov-id 19 virus pandemic, and we are faced with the same questions.

Will we make the same choice?

Will we choose to kill off what might emerge for the safety of what we have always known, even though we know it is far from the best we can do.....

Will we serve fear and all its dark tendrils that reach out and choke all new growth...?

Or might we choose to serve the goodness within us, the joyfulness within us, to examine our hearts for its complications, and try, as best we can, to ease the burden of others?

Might we choose to search after truth, knowing that its fullness will always allude us, though the effort redeems our purest selves?

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When the crowd, in our story, filled as it is with fear, makes its bold proclamation, it too speaks to us today.

“If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor..... we have no king except the emperor.”

When we claim we have no king except the emperor, we claim we have no sovereign birthright, no power to bring about change, no resistance to the virus of hatred.

We claim we have no internal divine spirit as Jesus did.

And when we claim to have no internal divinity, we are a slave to the violence others would press upon us, and worse, it would press on those less able to resist it.

“If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.”

Such truth...and Jesus, and every other brave soul who, as Bruce Coeburn wrote, “cried and died trying to set the angel in us free’ – everyone of them, no matter their faith tradition, was no friend to the emperor – whoever or whatever that was in their lifetime.

If you release the person inside you, if you release the divine spark of creation and all the compassionate power in which it was conceived, you will be no friend of the empires we have created and you will stand before them vulnerable.

And your only weapon will be love.

And it will enough.

*You're gonna have to serve somebody, yes you are
You're gonna have to serve somebody
Well, it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody. (Bob Dylan)*

Maybe now, maybe this day, maybe this hour.

We will make the right choice.

We will choose to serve love and release into this world the power of new creation.

Musical Interlude: *Gotta Serve Somebody*, Bob Dylan, 1979. Arranger: Bruce Ley, 2020

4th Reading: John 19: 17 – 27

So, they took Jesus; and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Many of the Jews read this

inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews 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.” When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

“They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.”

And that is what the soldiers did.

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.

Musical Interlude: Minor Variation, *What Wonderous Love is This?* Music: American Folk Hymn, Arranger: Bruce Ley, 2020

5th Reading: John 19: 28 – 30

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.

Musical Interlude: *Is Crucified*, Music: Bruce Ley – Note: gloss on *Come and Morn With Me Awhile*

6th Reading: John 19: 31 – 42:

Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath especially because that Sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then 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. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows^[a] that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus

by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Musical Interlude: *Come and Morn Awhile with Me?* Music: John Bacchus Dykes, 1861

Closing Prayer with the Lord's Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus,
Judas betrayed you in the garden,
But we have all betrayed you, and continue to do so even today....
Peter denied you, and so too, we deny you in the living out of our lives.....forgetting your way of love and compassion, even as we know it to be right and true....
We like to think that we would be the ones to stay true and strong and faithful and good. But the truth is, we forsake you, we betray you, we are a part and a parcel of an economy and a society that spits in your face and laughs at the perfect justice of your cross. Forgive us.

But you have remained true and faithful to us
Your forgiveness abounds
Your generosity astonishes.
Your mercy is beyond our comprehension.
You remained faithful to God, to us, to your way of love.
There you are stretched out on the cross, arms wide open to the world, heart fully open to God, in your last breath granting grace and forgiveness to all.....

Strengthen us, that we might be faithful too,
not turning aside,
not turning away,
not betraying you or denying you,
but following you through the sunlight and through the shadow,
for you have claimed the final victory over evil and darkness
with your gentle way and your humble spirit.
May we be worthy followers of the way of love
and steadfast friends,
leaning upon your council
and seeking out the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in all things.

Let us stand at the foot of your cross and turning our hearts to God, stretch out our loving and holy spirits to embrace the world....knowing our safety and our joy lies with you as we say together the prayer that you taught us so many years ago.....

Our father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name
They kingdom come, they will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us,

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

Forever and ever,

Amen.

Closing Music: *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross, Instrumental*, Music: William Howard Doane, 1869, Arranger: Bruce Ley, 2020.