

Tenebrae at Home



This year we celebrate Tenebrae (literally darkness) together in our homes. We make space in our living rooms or around our tables to gather with family and remember the Friday when our Lord Jesus died on the cross. We allow the sorrow of his death to infuse our own fear of death. We enter into his sufferings in order to better understand how he enters into our own. We allow the cross to reflect our own tendency to betray, abandon, deny, slander, condemn, and mock. We see that by His wounds, we are healed. This is the mystery we embrace on Good Friday.

You can enter into this mystery by taking time to create a sacred space in your home. Here are some suggestions, but anything you gather will be all you need.

- *Choose a room that can be darkened.*
- *Gather 1 to 7 candles and an 8th Christ candle*
- *Find matches and perhaps a flashlight.*
- *A Bible, a Bible app on your phone or the Jesus Storybook Bible*
- *An instrument or a pot to bang*
- *Cue up the spotify playlist if you would like to have music to accompany the journey:*
<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7pjDiVVxdmEI072egEIVzb>
- *Invite someone to join you on ZOOM.*



Below is a suggested liturgy to guide you. Use as much or as little as you like. It is enough if you read one passage, extinguish a candle and pray. For the most simple liturgy, **follow the purple print. This includes suggested readings from the Jesus Storybook Bible.**

Tenebrae

Seven Meditations on the Last Words of Christ on the Cross

Meditations

Get Ready: Pray the prayer of three deep breaths - In the name of the Father, our Creator. In the name of the Son, our Redeemer. In the name of the Holy Spirit, our Sustainer. Hold space for silence being attentive to God's presence.

Light seven candles. Don't have seven candles? Light what you have. They can be relit and extinguished.

Turn off or dim electric lights. If needed, use a headlamp or flashlight to read scripture. Put paper over the windows. On Easter Sunday, wake up and tear off this paper.

Say: Tonight we remember the last words of our Lord Jesus as he hung on the cross.



meditation

FIRST

Read: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing." Luke 23:34

Extended Reading: Luke 23:32-38

*Jesus Storybook Bible Reading 1 on page 19

Extinguish the first candle

*or read the meditation and then extinguish the candle.

First Meditation | In the first century the cross was a form of capital punishment for non-Roman criminals. It was a long and torturous death not suitable for a Roman citizen. You see death came through asphyxiation. At some point the victim ran out of strength to lift up to take a final breath. Roman soldiers would break the person's legs if there was a desire to see death come more quickly. Without legs to help lift up the body, the victim would run out of oxygen more quickly and die sooner.

This is why the words we hear are all quite brief. The effort it would have taken to speak would have been enormous. That makes these words that much more powerful.



First Meditation | continued

Jesus has had quite the road to get here:

Betrayed by one of his own disciples

Denied by his most loyal disciple

Slandered by witnesses

Condemned on trumped up charges in front of a kangaroo court

Flogged by cruel Roman guards

Mocked, spat upon, dishonored and rejected by the people he came to save

Jesus is crucified between two criminals

So what are the first words he utters? What would yours be? Let Justice be done? The first final words of Jesus' life are perhaps the best symbol of how he lived his whole life and what the Cross is all about: "Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do."

Forgive those who lied and bore false witness. Forgive those who inflicted cruelty and violence. Forgive those who plotted and manipulated justice. Forgive those who denied and betrayed their Lord. Forgive the raging crowd, and even the puppet leader. Forgive the liars, the haters, the betrayers, the deniers. Forgive them all Father. You see, they do not know what they are doing.

And 2000 years Jesus' words to us are the same. Forgive them father: the liars and cheaters, the prideful and the sloths, the greedy and those who oppress the poor. Forgive us, we do not know what we are doing.



meditation

SECOND

Read: "He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.'" Luke 23:43

Extended Reading: Luke 23:39-43

*no Storybook Bible option

Extinguish the second candle

*or read the meditation and then extinguish the candle.

Second Meditation | I have spent a very small amount of my life in real pain but enough time to know that real pain affects our whole lives. It can change our personality. It is harder to be kind and patient. That is why I am truly amazed that the second words from Jesus are not just forgiveness but extravagant kindness. Jesus directs his next words to one of the criminals crucified with him. "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."



Second Meditation | continued

There is a great mystery in the kingdom about who is saved, who will join Jesus in eternal life. We are told that those who have faith in Jesus will spend eternity with him and we live in that promise. But we never really know for sure the eternal future of any specific person because we don't know his or her heart and we are not his or her judge.

There is only one eternal future that we know for sure: the thief on the cross. One criminal mocked him but the other one defends the Lord. He knows that Jesus is innocent and he stands up for him, a final act of decency and courage. There is no statement of faith, no baptism, no repentance, no deeds of faith, no sinners prayer, none of the things we might think are needed for salvation, just an act of decent advocacy before his fellow criminal, a statement of guilt and Jesus' innocence followed by a request: "Jesus remember me when you get into your kingdom." And Jesus says, "Truly- today you will be with me in paradise."

The Grace of God is a mysterious thing. There is a wideness in God's mercy. It envelops tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, liars, and condemned criminals... and you and me... Truly my friends, one day we will be with him in paradise.



meditation

THIRD

Read: “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple who 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.” John 19:26, 27

Extended Reading: John 19:23–27

*no Storybook Bible option

Extinguish the third candle

*or read the meditation and then extinguish the candle.

Third Meditation | Our third word comes in the gospel of John. It involves six people: Jesus and his disciple John, the author of this text, then four women: Jesus’ mother, Mary wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene, and his aunt (mother’s sister).



Third Meditation | continued

The word of Jesus is to Mary his mother: *“Woman, here is your son.”*

Then to John, *“Here is your mother.”* The third Word of Jesus is a fulfillment of the commandment to honor your mother and father.

As Jesus is leaving, he looks after his mother.

But also, in a very small way, this is a small launch (commissioning?) of the church. This small group is now the church. They belong to each other. They are the only ones of the community who have stayed. From this little group comes the One, Holy, Apostolic Church. For Luke, the church is launched with Pentecost but for John it starts here with five sad people at the foot of the cross.



meditation

FOURTH

Read: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Matthew 27:46

Extended Reading: Matthew 27:45-49

Jesus Storybook Bible Reading 4 on page 19

Extinguish the fourth candle

*or read the meditation and then extinguish the candle.

Fourth Meditation | The fourth word from the cross is most mysterious. It is in Aramaic, the mother tongue of Jesus. And it is the first line of a Psalm, Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Psalms at that time were known by their first line. There were no numbers. Two thousand years ago this Psalm was not known as Psalm 22; it was known as My God, my God why have you forsaken me? So our question is, was Jesus sharing his deepest thoughts or was he quoting Psalm 22? or both?



Fourth Meditation | continued

When we read the Psalm there are numerous parallels:

All who see me mock me...I am poured out like water...

My bones are out of joint...

My mouth is dried up...

You lay me in the dust of death...

I can count all my bones...

They divide my clothing amongst themselves...

This is a psalm that describes many of the exact elements of Jesus suffering on the cross. It also ends with a powerful word of victory and hope,

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;

before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,

and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he

has done it. (Psalm 22:29-31)

Jesus could have been saying Psalm 22, the suffering and the hope all mashed together on the cross. Or he could have been crying out his agony from the depth of his heart, "My God why have you forsaken me?" Or in the mystery of the moment, both?



meditation

FIFTH

Read: "After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), 'I am thirsty.'" John 19:28

Extended Reading: John 19:28-29

*no Storybook Bible option

Extinguish the fifth candle

*or read the meditation and then extinguish the candle.

Fifth Meditation | The fifth and sixth last words happen right next to each other. The sixth word is "it is finished." In the fifth word we hear "finished two times."

*Jesus knew that all was now finished
he said (in order to fulfill the scripture)*

The fifth word, "I am thirsty." Through all he has been through, this is his only cry of pain or need. There is a jar of sour wine right there, a popular drink among Roman soldiers. After such cruelty, there is this one act of kindness. They put a sponge in the sour wine and they lift it up with a branch of Hyssop.



Fifth Meditation | continued

Hyssop has a symbolic role in Jewish practice. During the Passover meal, after killing the lamb, the family would dip a branch of Hyssop into the blood of the lamb and mark the lintel of the front door so that the angel of death would pass over them. During a Seder Passover meal parsley is dipped in salt water, symbolizing the Hyssop used by the people of God in the Passover story.

The wine is also symbolic. Jesus began his ministry turning water into wine, the best wine. He celebrates the passover with the disciples saying, "this wine is my blood of the new covenant." And now his final drink is sour wine on a branch of Hyssop.

The Hyssop branch of Passover now has the wine of communion. What the blood of the lamb has always done for Jews is now done by the blood of Jesus, symbolized by the wine.



meditation

SIXTH

Read: "When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." John 19:30

*Jesus Storybook Bible Reading 1 on page 20

Extinguish the sixth candle

*or read the meditation and then extinguish the candle.

Sixth Meditation | The sixth word is foreshadowed in the fifth word. Jesus knew that all was finished and he fulfills scripture. And near the end of all his suffering, Jesus has just enough energy to rise up and utter one one last word – "finished."

What is finished?

The mocking...

The temptation...

The pain and suffering...

The ordeal, life itself...

The reconciliation of the world...

The mission of Jesus is finished. Completed. Accomplished. Done.

This finish we know is really a new beginning.



Sixth Meditation | continued

Notice the scripture says, Jesus bows his head. Here is something fascinating: in Greek a bowed head is used to make a solemn promise, a sworn affirmation. If you were to make a promise in Greek culture, you would make it with a bowed head. The salvation promise, the redemption mission is finished, fulfilled.

Notice in this scripture Jesus “gives up his Spirit.” But it also could be read, Jesus “gives over the Spirit.” It could mark his death or it could be Pentecost. Jesus had promised his disciples that his death would mean that they would get the Spirit. On the cross, Jesus launches the church with the small group huddled at the foot of the cross and hands over the Spirit. Later he will breathe on the disciples and pass it on to the rest of them.



meditation

SEVENTH

Read: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Luke 23:46

Extended Reading: Luke 23:44-49

*Jesus Storybook Bible Reading 1 on page 20

Extinguish the seventh candle

*or read the meditation and then extinguish the candle.

Seventh Meditation | Matthew and Mark write that Jesus cried out with a loud voice and breathed his last. But the historian Luke writes that the final cry, before the final breath, is "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit."



Seventh Meditation | continued

Our last word is uttered in darkness. The text says this darkness comes at noon. The light of Jesus is extinguished and so is the light of the sun. He who came as light ends his life in darkness.

The temple curtain that separated off the Holy of Holies, that curtain is ripped in two. The separation is now gone. Not only do humans have access into the Holy of Holies but the Almighty Creator now has access to his people.

One of the guards recognizes the innocence of Jesus and the travesty of this event. And the crowd watching, they know it too. It falls heavy on their shoulders. They have been a part of something so wrong, so evil, so vile. And all return home beating their breasts as the shame of the moment washes over them. What they don't know is that everything has changed.



Final scripture reading: John 19:38-42

Extinguish the Christ candle.

(re-light this candle early Easter morning)

Spend time in silence and finish the liturgy by singing

“Were You There”

<https://youtu.be/fpSSclCWJ9M1>

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

2 Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

3 Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?



Jesus Storybook Bible Readings

Jesus Storybook Bible Reading 1:

The Sun Stops Shining

The Crucifixion, from Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19

"So you're a king are you?" the Roman soldiers jeered. "then you'll need a crown and a robe."

They gave Jesus a crown made out of thorns. And put a purple robe on him. And pretended to bow down to him. "Your Majesty!" they said.

Then they whipped him. And spat on him. They didn't understand that this was the Prince of Life, the King of heaven and earth, who had come to rescue them.

The soldiers made him a sign - "Our King" and nailed it to a wooden cross.

They walked up a hill outside the city. Jesus carried the cross on his back. Jesus had never done anything wrong. But they were going to kill him the way criminals were killed.

They nailed Jesus to the cross.

"Father, forgive them," Jesus gasped. They don't understand what they're doing."

Jesus Storybook Bible Reading 4:

The Sun Stops Shining

The Crucifixion, from Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19

"You say you've come to rescue us! People shouted. "But you can't even rescue yourself!"

But they were wrong. Jesus could have rescued himself. A legion of angels would have flown to his side - if he'd called.

"If you were really the Son of God, you could just climb down off that cross!" they said. And of course they were right. Jesu could have just climbed down.

Actually, he could have just said a word and made it all stop. Like when he healed that little girl. And stilled the storm. And fed 5,000 people.

But Jesus stayed.

You see, they didn't understand. It wasn't the nails that kept Jesus there. It was love. "Papa?" Jesus cried, frantically searching the sky. "Papa? Where are you? Don't leave me!"

Jesus Storybook Bible Readings

Jesus Storybook Bible Reading 6:

The Sun Stops Shining

The Crucifixion, from Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19

Tears rolled down Jesus' face. The face of the One who would wipe away every tear from every eye. Even though it was midday, a dreadful darkness covered the face of the world. The sun could not shine. The earth trembled and quaked. The great mountains shook. Rocks split in two. Until it seemed that the whole world would break. That creation itself would tear apart.

The full force of the storm of God's fierce anger at sin was coming down. On his own Son. Instead of his people. It was the only way God could destroy sin, and not destroy his children whose hearts were filled with sin.

Then Jesus shouted out in a loud voice, "It is finished!"

Jesus Storybook Bible Reading 7:

The Sun Stops Shining

The Crucifixion, from Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19

And it was (finished). He had done it. Jesus had rescued the whole world. "Father!" Jesus cried. "I give you my life." And with a great sigh he let himself die. Strange clouds and shadows filled the sky. Purple, orange, black. Like a bruise.