

Good Friday Prayer Vigil Guide



Congregational Church of Laconia, New Hampshire

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for participating in our Good Friday prayer vigil. You've signed up to pray for an hour (or more), and this guide is meant to help you know what to do with that time!

First, you may wonder WHERE to pray. You can pray anywhere! If you choose to pray at home you might give some forethought to this question so you can help yourself find a place where there are few distractions during your prayer time. If you have a regular place you pray, then you are set. It is important that you find a place where you feel very connected to God, but can be apart from distractions or the temptation to sleep, a place where you can be comfortable and engaged at the same time.

Next, think about your body and what to do with it while you pray. Sometimes the POSITION in which we pray makes a lot of difference.

Often the image we have of prayer is of sitting or kneeling with our hands folded, but it doesn't always have to be this way. If you want to sit, you can keep your hands open, facing upwards, as if to receive from the Divine. If sitting for an extended period of time isn't comfortable (or if it's too comfortable in the middle of the night) there are prayer practices that involve walking. There are even those who pray through dance. You might have a rocking chair that works for you, splitting the difference between sitting and moving. I encourage you to think about this for just a minute so that it doesn't become a distraction to you when you pray. Think ahead about what will be comfortable, but engaging for the hour you are in prayer.

Now, particularly if you are newer at praying for an extended time, you can start thinking about HOW TO PRAY.

This booklet is full of suggestions and guidance for you. There are a few suggestions of different prayer styles you might try out. There are some "prayer classics" which come to us through the traditions of the church which you might experiment with. There are some meditations which you can read, to help guide your reflections. There are prayers of intercession. And there are prayers meant particularly for Lenten reflection. We each have particular styles of prayer that are more meaningful to us.

This booklet is meant to speak to several different styles. So do not feel as though you need to get through them all or even use them all. Listen for your gut to tell you which form or style draws you. Don't worry about the parts that don't. Don't feel limited by this guide (or the time frame) either. If you have your own method, then use that. If you want to pray longer or more frequently than the hour you signed up for, please do. If an hour of prayer is a stretch for you, good for you for taking the step to grow into that. Don't be afraid! Think of it as hanging out with God for an hour. You don't have to come up with words for that whole time, or even any of that time. Listen. . . Breathe. . . Take time just to be in God's presence.

The GOAL of this prayer vigil time is to collectively enter into prayer during this holiest time of year. As a church family we are joining together from wherever we are, handing off the vigil from one person to the next. It's a way of joining together even when we are apart. It's a way of trusting that we are in covenant together, taking turns to cover our church, our community, our world with prayer as we dwell in the darkness of Good Friday. It's an opportunity to be fueled by closeness to God and create a culture in which prayer is woven into the fabric of our daily lives and our relationships with each other.



PRAYERS OF PEACE AND SURRENDER

O God of peace, You have taught us that in returning and rest, we shall be saved,
in quietness and confidence shall be our strength.

By the might of your spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence,
where we may be still and know that you are God.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, forever and
ever, Amen. (Book of Common Prayer, Episcopalian)

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations,
so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you.

And then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people.

Through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.

(Book of Common Prayer)

Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition (Methodist)

I am no longer my own, but thine.

Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering;

let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,

exalted for thee or brought low for thee;

let me be full, let me be empty;

let me have all things, let me have nothing;

I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

thou art mine, and I am thine.

So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.

Amen.

A Celtic prayer

I weave a silence onto my lips

I weave a silence into my mind

I weave a silence within my heart

I close my ears to distractions

I close my eyes to attractions

I close my heart to temptation.

Calm me, O God, as you stilled the storm,

Still me, O God, keep me from harm.

Let all tumult within me cease;

Enfold me, O God, in your peace.

Lord's Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Heavenly Mother,
 holy and blessed is your true name.
 We pray for your reign of peace to come.
 We pray that your good will be done.
 Let heaven and earth become one.
 Give us this day the bread we need.
 Give it to those who have none.
 Let forgiveness flow like a river between us,
 from each one to each one to each one.
 Lead us to holy innocence beyond the evil of our days.
 Come swiftly Mother, Father come,
 for yours is the power, and the mercy, and the glory.
 Forever your name is all in one. Amen.

**SUGGESTED INTERCESSORY PRAYERS**

Pray for:

- + The ministry and missions of the Congregational Church of Laconia
- + The New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ
- + Our Conference Ministers, Rev. Gordon Rankin and Rev. Linda Hirst, and Conference office staff: Tivvi Paré (Horton Center), Matt Alighieri, Lydia Frasca, Cameron Keller, Kayla Pingree
- + Our sister churches throughout New Hampshire
- + Our national and world leaders
 - + An end to armed conflict around the world
- + Those who are hungry every day
- + Those who are grieving
- + Those who suffer from injury or disability
- + Those who suffer from life-threatening illness
- + Those who suffer from mental illness
- + Those in financial hardship
- + The unemployed
- + The oppressed and abused of this world
- + The healing of our environment, God's creation
- + Immigration issues
- + Our enemies
- + The most vulnerable among us

PRAYER STYLES

Breath prayer: (Sometimes thought of as “Centering Prayer”) Choose a phrase which most closely reflects your address for God, such as “loving Father”, “heavenly Savior”, “divine wisdom”, etc. Then choose a short phrase which is your petition to God at this time – fill me, guide me, give me peace, etc. Then close your eyes and focus on your breath. Breathe slowly and deeply. On your inhale, repeat your name for God in your mind, and on the exhale, repeat your petition. If your thoughts wander, simply release them and return to your breath prayer.

Try this for about five minutes.

Jesus prayer: (the Eastern Orthodox tradition calls this Hesychast or Quiet Prayer) This prayer has been used from the time of the early church and is often cited as the means by which we might “pray without ceasing.” It is a simple repetition of “*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.*” There are many versions, and if you know another version, feel free to use it. This prayer can be used throughout the day and often instills a sense of peace, helping one who prays it stay centered in God.

Try this for about five minutes.

Body prayer: Try various prayer postures if you feel comfortable doing so. This might include kneeling, bowing, lying face down on the floor, raising your arms in a posture of praise, holding your palms face up on your lap as a symbol of receptivity to God, etc. The Catholic tradition of making the sign of the cross is another kind of body prayer. If you like, try this while reciting the Great Commandment “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

Prayer beads: Used in several traditions, including Catholicism, Islam, and Buddhism. Starting at the end, or the clasp, of a string of beads, hold one between your fingers as you say a simple prayer (one of the ones above, or one of your own). Move your fingers to hold the next bead, and say a simple prayer. You can repeat the same prayer for several beads, or choose different prayers for different bead sizes/styles. The act of holding a bead, or rolling it between your fingers, can help you focus with less distraction.

Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)

Praying with Scripture has been the most traditional springboard to contemplative prayer. A variety of methods are used, one of which follows:

- Relax. Settle in. Be aware that God is here, now, loving you.
- Read a short passage of Scripture as though God were speaking directly to you in it.
- Choose a phrase from the passage that strikes you and repeat it slowly, prayerfully, non-analytically.
- When your heart is full, express to God the needs and sentiments awakened by your meditation.
- When you’re done, read another passage and repeat steps 3 and 4.
- If, at any time, you feel moved to simply be present to God in loving silence, put the Scripture aside and rest in God.

HOLY WEEK MEDITATION

Oh, how we love Palm Sunday – the triumphal entry, the waving palms, the cloaks lining the road as our Savior made his way into the city, the cries of “Hosanna! Save us!” The Hebrew people were crying out to be saved from the oppressive Roman rule, from a life of hardship, crushing taxes, and forced service to the Roman Empire. They were hoping that Jesus was the Messiah they had been taught was coming, a powerful leader who would overthrow the despised government and bring a new reign of peace, prosperity and freedom. This was a here-and-now kind of expectation, but Jesus had a larger goal in mind. The people’s short-sighted desires were not Jesus’ idea for the kingdom of God.

I confess that I, too, am sometimes short-sighted, pleading for God’s saving grace from whatever immediate difficulty I face, whatever painful event is making my life less than ideal today. Yet God always hold the longer view, the future perspective. God is looking for a relationship with us that is not defined by good times or bail-outs from whatever difficulty in which we find ourselves.

Hanmer Parsons Grant once said, “We must free ourselves of the hope that the sea will ever rest. We must learn to sail in high winds.” This is the essence of life, and it is a life that strengthens us, purifies us and brings about growth and wisdom. Knowing this to be true, we must let go of our individually-focused prayers and learn to take God’s larger perspective. The Israelites were not really interested in the kind of salvation Jesus offered – a liberation that was available to all people everywhere and for all time. They just wanted to be free of their immediate misery. And they were (as we often are) certainly expecting it to be accomplished via a grand gesture of human strength. They had their hero stories – the parting of the Red Sea, the tumbling Jericho wall, the stunning defeat of Goliath – just as we have ours – Douglas MacArthur, or Martin Luther King Jr, or John Wayne, or even the Avengers. Rarely do our heroes resemble this Jesus who rode on a lowly donkey and got himself crucified by the establishment. It is easy to close our eyes to the glory of something more, a parallel universe of love and grace that can be accessed at any moment, a salvation for all that doesn’t have to be earned. But it does require the one thing that may be hardest of all for the human animal – removing Self from the center of our heart and mind and soul and putting God there instead; shifting from asking “how do I get what I need” towards “how do I help meet our common needs?” We must loosen our grasp on ego-driven agendas and momentary relief and enter into a relationship of profound trust with our Creator and Friend. Perhaps only then will we learn to sail in high winds and feel the exhilaration of the waves without fear, for it is God at the helm.

-adapted from Sue Magrath, a speaker, presenter, and retreat leader specializing in the integration of spirituality & psychology.

WAITING FOR GOD

It is sometimes easy to deliver an unhappy person from his present distress, but it is difficult to set him free from his past affliction. Only God can do it. And even the grace of God itself cannot cure our irremediably wounded nature here below. The glorified body of Christ bore the marks of nail and spear.

One can only accept the existence of affliction by considering it at a distance.

God created through love and for love. God did not create anything except love itself, and the means to love. He created love in all its forms. He created beings capable of love from all possible distances. Because no other could do it, he himself went to the greatest possible distance, the infinite distance. This infinite distance between God and God, this supreme tearing apart, this agony beyond all others, this marvel of love, is the crucifixion. Nothing can be further from God than that which has been made accursed.

This tearing apart, over which supreme love places the bond of supreme union, echoes perpetually across the universe in the midst of the silence, like two notes, separate yet melting into one, like pure and heart-rending harmony. This is the Word of God. The whole creation is nothing but its vibration. When human music in its greatest purity pierces our soul, this is what we hear through it. When we have learned to hear the silence, this is what we grasp more distinctly through it.

Those who persevere in love hear this note from the very lowest depths into which affliction has thrust them. From that moment they can no longer have any doubt.

Simone Weil, excerpted from "The God of Love and Affliction."

TRUTH TO TELL

There are many ways to tell the story of what happened on Good Friday. According to John, it involved a collision between religion and politics. While Pilate and the chief priests conspired to solve their mutual problem while managing to remain enemies, Jesus stood at the center of the stage like a mirror in which all those around him saw themselves clearly for who they were. One way we as Christians have avoided seeing our own reflections in the mirror is to pretend that this is a story about Romans and Jews. As long as they remain the villains, then we are off the hook – or so we think. Unfortunately, this is not a story that happened long ago in a land far away.

Sons and daughters of God are killed in every generation. They have been killed in holy wars and inquisitions, concentration camps and prison cells. They have been killed in Cape Town, Memphis, El Salvador, and Alabama. The charges against them have run the gamut, but treason and blasphemy have headed the list, just as they did for Jesus. He upset those in charge at the courthouse and the temple. He suggested they were not doing their jobs. He offered himself as a mirror they could see themselves in, and they were so appalled by what they saw that they smashed it. They smashed him in every way they could.

One of the many things this story tells us is that Jesus was not brought down by atheism and anarchy. He was brought down by law and order allied with religion, which is always a deadly mix. Beware those who claim to know the mind of God and who are prepared to use force, if necessary, to make others conform. Beware those who cannot tell God's will from their own. Temple police are always a bad sign. When chaplains start wearing guns and hanging out at the sheriff's office, watch out. Someone is about to have no king but Caesar.

This is a story that can happen anywhere at any time, and we are as likely to be the perpetrators as the victims. I doubt that many of us will end up playing Annas, Caiaphas, or Pilate, however. They may have been the ones who gave Jesus the death sentence, but a large part of him had already died before they ever got to him – the part Judas killed off, then Peter, then all those who fled. Those are the roles with our names on them – not the enemies but the friends.

Whenever someone famous gets in trouble, that is one of the first things the press focuses on. What do his friends do? Do they support him or do they tell reporters that, unfortunately, they had seen trouble coming for some time? One of the worst things a friend can say is what Peter said. *"We weren't friends, exactly. Acquaintances might be a better word. Actually, we just worked together. For the same company, I mean. Not together, just near each other. My desk was near his. I really don't know him at all."*

No one knows what Judas said. In John's Gospel he does not say a word, but where he stands says it all. After he has led some 200 Roman soldiers and the temple police to the secret garden

where Jesus is praying, Judas stands with the militia. Even when Jesus comes forward to identify himself, Judas does not budge. He is on the side with the weapons and the handcuffs, and he intends to stay there.

Or maybe it was not his own safety that motivated him. Maybe he just fell out of love with Jesus. That happens sometimes. One day you think someone is wonderful and the next day he says or does something that makes you think twice. He reminds you of the difference between the two of you and you start hating him for that – for the difference – enough to begin thinking of some way to hurt him back.

I remember being at a retreat once where the leader asked us to think of someone who represented Christ in our lives. When it came time to share our answers, one woman stood up and said, “I had to think hard about that one. I kept thinking, Who is it who told me the truth about myself so clearly that I wanted to kill him for it?” According to John, Jesus died because he told the truth to everyone he met. He *was* the truth, a perfect mirror in which people saw themselves in God’s own light.

What happened then goes on happening now. In the presence of his integrity, our own pretense is exposed. In the presence of his constancy, our cowardice is brought to light. In the presence of his fierce love for God and for us, our own hardness of heart is revealed. Take him out of the room and all those things become relative. I am not that much worse than you are, nor you than I, but leave him in the room and there is no room to hide. He is the light of the world. In his presence, people either fall down to worship him or do everything they can to extinguish his light.

A cross and nails are not always necessary. There are a thousand ways to kill him, some of them as obvious as choosing where you will stand when the showdown between the weak and the strong comes along, others of them as subtle as keeping your mouth shut when someone asks you if you know him.

Today, while he dies, do not turn away. Make yourself look in the mirror. Today, no one gets away without being shamed by his beauty. Today, no one flees without being laid bare by his light.

Barbara Brown Taylor, Episcopal Priest, Author, and Lecturer

LENTEN PRAYERS

Psalm 31

In You, Beloved, I would make my home;

Though I be humiliated with guilt,

Your mercy and forgiveness will deliver me!

Hear me and hasten to my assistance!

For You are my strength and have the power to raise me up!

Yes, You are strength and truth to me;

lead me and guide me that I may grow;

Loosen me from the net which entangles me, for your Heart is my home.

Into your hands I commend my soul;

You have redeemed me, O Love, Faithful One.

You turn from those who trust in false idols;

I put my trust in You, O Beloved.

I rejoice and am glad for your steadfast Love, for You have seen my guilt,

You have noted my wrongdoings,

And have not left me alone with my fears;

Rather, You have set my feet on the path of love.

Be gracious to me, Beloved, for I am in distress;

my eyes are dim from weeping, my soul is deep with grief.

For my life is worn away with sorrow,

and my years with sighing;

My body has weakened and my bones waste away with misery . . .

Still, I trust in You, O Love, I repeat, "You are my Life."

My life is in your hands; deliver me from the fears which separate me!

Let your face shine on me; save me in your steadfast love!

. . . So, be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you, who would know Love!

Psalm 22 (NRSV)

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.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people.

All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

‘Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver— let him rescue the one in whom he delights!’

Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.

On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me.

My hands and feet have shrivelled; I can count all my bones.

They stare and gloat over me; they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.

But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!

Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion!

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.

I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live for ever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

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.

The Farewell Tear

a feast of friendship, a story of betrayal, a memory of gifts given
you look with such intense love on each one gathered there,
mist covers your deep brown eyes as you hold each one in your gaze,
you close your eyes and I see
the farewell tear of friendship as it follows the curve of your cheek.
you take the bread, bless it gently, profoundly, with old words and new.
(do you mean to say it is yourself?)
and then the wine, again with words old and new.
(do you mean to say this, too, is now yourself?)
you look again at each one there and give the eternal gift:
“remember me and do the same.”
like those around the table then, so with us who gather now,
if we knew how close our hearts are held inside of yours,
we would always be amazed that you meant this for us, too.
how shall we ever be brave enough to do what you have done,
when grief engulfs our every breath
and each memorial word is laden with our loss?

Joyce Rupp. *out of the ordinary: prayers, poems, and reflections for every season*
(NotreDame: Ave Maria Press, 2000), 123.

Carrying the Cross

Response: *Jesus, grant us strength to carry our cross.*

On those days when life seems too demanding with all its cares, burdens, and concerns . . . R

When we experience great loneliness deep inside and the pain of separation fills our spirits . . . R

When we feel the pain of our world and unite in compassion with the Earth's suffering people . . . R

When we struggle with decision-making and the time comes to make good choices about our lives . . . R

When we are with others in their physical pain or when we vigil with one who has a terminal illness . . . R

When we are asked to go the extra mile, to be generous with our time and our presence . . . R

When we feel weary and worn out, when it seems like all of our energy has been drained away . . . R

When we are challenged to risk our security and to accept new growth in our relationship with you . . . R

When we experience the effects of aging or extended illness on our bodies or our minds . . . R

When we feel discouraged, desolate, and depressed and want to withdraw from others . . . R

When worries and concerns choke our peacefulness and leave us with anxiety and fear . . . R

When we harbor old wounds and are called to offer or to receive forgiveness . . . R

Crucified Jesus, help us to take up our cross day by day.

Through these crosses we can grow closer to you.

Help us to lean on you and to learn from you. May we not give in to self-pity or self-doubt.

Rather, let us trust in your presence which strengthens us. Encourage us on our tomb-like days.

Remind us of your resurrection. Help us to keep our vision focused on life and growth. Amen.

-Joyce Rupp, op. cit., 117