

In following this service you might like to have five candles available and light and extinguish them as indicated in the text below.

Please feel free to pause the service for reflection at any point.

A Service of Darkness and Light

Based on the Holy Week service of Tenebrae

In this service we remember the dark side of Holy Week, the suffering and death of Jesus. It is based on the Good Friday Tenebrae, or shadow, services that date back to early church history.

There are five shadows that we explore representing five stages of the Good Friday events. At each stage, part of the gospel narrative is read, there is time for reflection and a time of prayer. At each stage, one candle is extinguished, until all have been extinguished. This is a sombre service, with time for reflection on the sufferings of Christ.

But we are Easter people, we know the end of the story, so our service ends with new light, with words of commission to the first witnesses of his resurrection, and to us, to continue telling the story.

Five Candles are lit

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

*Living God, as we prepare to contemplate the events of Good Friday
–the blackest of days –a day on which hearts were broken
and faith tested to the limit, give us new insight into what you did that
day, for us and for all. Amen*

The shadow of denial

Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written,

"I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."

But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.' Peter said to him, 'Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.' Jesus said to him, 'Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' Peter said to him, 'Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And so said all the disciples.

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

What happened to Peter?

Peter was strong, Peter was brave, he wasn't afraid of anything

But perhaps Peter's strength was also his weakness.

Because Peter thought he could handle anything by himself.

But after Jesus' arrest,

surrounded by the power of the Roman army,

Peter didn't feel so strong.

For what good is the strength of one man

against the powers of darkness?

So Peter was afraid.

And because he was afraid, he denied Jesus.

The people asked Peter if he knew Jesus.

Later in his life Peter might have seen this as

a chance to witness, but not now. Now he was scared.

Now he was more afraid of other people than of God.

So he denied that he ever knew Jesus.

Not once, not twice, but three times he denied Jesus.

We reflect on the times, O Lord, when we deny you in what we think, in

what we say, in what we do,

and we ask your forgiveness.

One Candle is extinguished

The Shadow of Suffering

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 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!' They spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him.

Then they led him away to crucify him.

*Jesus was betrayed, denied, deserted by his disciples,
separated from His Father,
insulted, accused, flogged, beaten, bruised, laughed at.
Jesus deserved a crown of gold, we gave Him a crown of thorns.
This was a day of appalling suffering and agonizing death,
a day when all hell was let loose
and love seemed overwhelmed,
yet we call this day 'Good Friday'.
For in all that horror you were there.
In the despair, in the pain, in the humiliation, in the sorrow,
You were supremely at work,
Demonstrating the immensity of your love.*

One Candle is extinguished

The shadow of crucifixion

And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'

Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." 'The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

Jesus told us to pick up our cross and follow Him.

Lord, I confess that I don't want a cross.

I want a comfortable home with no worries.

I don't want to lay down my life.

But you laid down your life, you went to the cross:

you faced the pain, embraced the suffering,

accepted the humiliation.

This is central to our faith:

You loved us so much that you gave your life.

One Candle is extinguished

The shadow of death

From noon onwards, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 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?'

When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' 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. But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.'

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

*Lord Jesus Christ,
Living as we do in the light of Easter
We can lose sight sometimes
Of the darkness of Good Friday.
But for those who were part of it
There could be no mistake,
No escaping the awfulness of seeing you
Hanging there upon the cross.
For them it was their darkest hour,
What seemed like the end of all their dreams, and for a time their faith
swung in the balance.
Yet even there, especially there, you were at work,
Bringing your love to all.
Lord Jesus Christ, teach us that even when life seems dark,
Your light continues to shine. Amen*

One Candle is extinguished

The shadow of burial

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

We thank you for Joseph of Arimathea, who came to the governor by night and asked for the Life of all to be laid in his garden of graves. We thank you for Mary, who with sorrow wept as she saw her son hanging on the tree, her heart pierced with sorrow. We thank you for all the women, who went to the grave to watch, to weep and offer fragrant spices of devotion. We too will watch and weep and offer you our tears, our memories, our tenderness, our faith.

One Candle is extinguished

After the Shadows

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.

And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.

But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.'

So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

Lord as we prepare to celebrate your resurrection, strengthen us to tell the Good News to the whole world. In the power of the risen Lord, may we be led from darkness into His glorious light.

All the candles are relit

May the Christ raised in glory scatter the darkness from our hearts and minds and from this world, and may the light of the risen Christ burst through our shadows this night and always. Amen