



Resource Centre

From our Churches

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A Funeral for Jesus **Good Friday Service**

Also found on Carol's blog – www.leadinginworship.com

NOTE: In this service, we put ourselves into the shoes of Jesus' family and closest friends as they mourned his death. They did not have a funeral for Jesus, but they saw his body and knew that he died. In our culture, we have a funeral for people who have died. When we perform that ritual, it is clear that someone has passed away. Having a service that is funeral-like on Good Friday can hammer home to us in a very deep, visceral way that Jesus really died. Most people have been to many Good Friday services where it is explained that Jesus died for our sins. That is an important message, but not one that this service talks about. This service doesn't talk about that since we are putting ourselves into the shoes of the disciples and Jesus' family; just after he died they were in a time of shock, of wondering and not understanding.

For this service it's important that the feel of a funeral be cultivated (special funeral-like music for prelude, book of condolences in the foyer, special "funeral bulletin," ushers/funeral directors, processional (with congregation standing), special flower arrangements on the sanctuary table, funeral-like song selections, etc.)

Songs chosen should not necessarily explain the whole salvation story (or be the "typical" Good Friday repertoire) since that is not the story the disciples would have known on this day.

Try to find participants who can give their tributes with conviction and emotion...not just reading. Think of how people who do tributes at funerals present their stories, and try to do that yourself.

Welcome & Opening Prayer

Dearly beloved,
friends of Jesus,
we gather together in the sight of God,
filled with sorrow and grief.
Our friend Jesus has suffered and he has died,
and his earthly body has been laid to rest.
This is a tender time,
we have come to grieve and to comfort one another in our sorrow,
and to draw on God's love and power.
We have come to remember all that Jesus said to us,
and to take comfort in the shelter of the almighty God.

Let's pray:

Almighty and ever-loving God,
Thank you for this time we have together
to gather and reflect on Jesus' life:
you knew Jesus through and through,
you loved him from the moment he was conceived.
You were with him on the day of his birth, and on the day of his death.
You gave him a good life, a wonderful family,
he loved them deeply and they loved him deeply in return.
You walked with him in good times and hard times,
you were with him even on this dark Friday.
Be with us today
in our tears,
in our aching hearts
in the smiles that memories bring
as we grieve and remember Jesus.
Be with us now,
Amen.

Hymn: HWB 144 - *Kyrie Eleison*

Scripture: Psalm 69:1-21

Hymn: HWB 257 - *Were you there, verses 1-4*

Scripture: Isaiah 53:1-9

Hymn: STS 121 *Nothing is lost on the breath of God*

Life Story of Jesus of Nazareth

Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph of Nazareth while they were sojourning in Bethlehem during Herod's great taxation. His parents lived in Egypt for a number of years when he was a small boy, moving the family back to Nazareth so Jesus could grow up among his extended family. A highlight of his childhood was a family trip to Jerusalem for Passover when he was around 12 years old. Jesus decided that he wasn't ready to go home, but he forgot to inform his parents, who only discovered he wasn't with the return caravan when they were many miles from the city. His parents never let him forget that; maybe in response to that experience, he lived a very quiet life, never straying far from

home until he was in his 30's. While Jesus never married, he was very involved in the lives of his extended family, their children and the family carpentry business. Jesus was a big support for his mother Mary in her grief after his father's passing.

When Jesus was in his early 30's, a visit with his cousin John changed the course of his life. After this visit, he left Nazareth to lead an unsettled life, never having a home of his own again. He became a big traveller, passing through Galilee and Judea and even into Samaria and the land beyond the Jordan. His family hoped that he would get over his travelling bug and settle down and raise a family, but that was not to be. Jesus was a person with a special light, a light from God, like the prophets of old. He travelled because he had a message from God. He was a powerful speaker, enthralled the young and the old, the rich and the poor alike with his insight and wisdom. He spoke to us of the great compassion of God, and that we too should have love for one another.

In the course of Jesus' travels he came to have 12 special friends who he called his disciples, as well as numerous followers, male and female, who generously provided for his needs out of their own resources.

Jesus had many interesting encounters with people. If you tried to write down everything he did, the world could not contain the stories. He could make friends with anyone; tax collectors, people possessed by demons, the educated, the rich, people who were blind or lame, lepers, Pharisees, Samaritans...Jesus was interested in everyone. He was the kindest man, the most loving man....a person who had special powers given to him by God. Those of you here who have seen the power of his miracles know what I am talking about.

In the final years of his life, Jesus became famous, with thousands flocking to hear him speak. Some believed him to be the Messiah, the chosen one of Israel. While he was deeply loved he also had some bitter enemies, people who were threatened by his sometimes biting honesty. He became so famous he attracted the attention of religious and political leaders, who plotted to kill him. One of his own disciples, who we will not name today (God have mercy on his soul), betrayed him.

Jesus was arrested and tried before Pontius Pilate. Up to the end, there were some among us who hoped for a display of God's power, that Jesus would begin to speak and amaze all who heard him, as he amazed us all for so long. But he didn't open his mouth in those final days. Those who saw him in his final hours describe someone who was resolute in his faith, still talking to God even as he was executed by crucifixion, as a common criminal. He died just outside the city of Jerusalem that he loved, on the Friday before Passover.

Left to grieve his passing are his mother Mary, his brother James and various in-laws, his Aunt Mary, wife of Clopas, many cousins, nieces and nephews, his 11 special followers, and innumerable friends. He was predeceased by his father Joseph and his cousin John, the baptizer.

While Jesus had no children of his own, and never made very much money or owned any property, he left a mark that will never be forgotten. He will be remembered forever in the hearts of those who love him.

Hymn: HWB 615 - *Shall we gather at the river*

Scripture: John 15:12-17

Tribute – by Peter, disciple

I didn't want to get up to do this tribute, but the other disciples said I must, I had to, and so I am speaking for all of them too. We got to know Jesus about the same time, around 3 years ago, when he had just started travelling.

What do you say about a stranger who tells you to leave your family and your home and your career and go with him? What do you say about someone who asks you to do that, and you do it? He was the kind of person you listened to, you listened to him from a deep place inside yourself. It was like he had the words of life, and you wanted to listen. Or, as my young friend John says, it was like he WAS the word. The word of life. And you wanted to listen to him forever.

And we listened and we listened, but I can't say I understood everything he said, although God knows I tried. Jesus was very patient, listening to our questions. After he'd been teaching the crowds, we'd pull him aside and ask him what he really meant, and he would explain it all again. He had that kind of patience.

I'm a fisherman by trade, and anyone who knows me will tell you that I can work hard. But I didn't have half the energy that Jesus had. We'd walk all day, Jesus would preach half the night to people, and we could hardly hold our eyes open. Finally we'd get to bed somewhere, and in the morning we'd wake up and Jesus was gone. He was out on the hills praying half the night. He got energy just from being with God.

There was a power about Jesus that I've never seen in any one else, alive or dead. He spoke from a place of power and he could change things with his word, with his touch. He spoke with power to those with sicknesses, he healed the blind, the lame. He could speak to demons and they would heed him. And I know some of you may find this hard to believe, but he could speak to the wind, and to the storm, and it would obey him. He spoke to a dead man, and called him back to life. It may all sound unbelievable, but we saw it with our own eyes. This is the kind of man he was.

And in spite of all that amazing power, he was just one of us. He was our friend. He cared for us, talked to each us about our own troubles. He knew us through and through. Travelling together, you get to know each other really well, and you don't always get along. We were sometimes unreasonable, sometimes angry, irritable, what have you, but Jesus was always there encouraging us.

And we, his disciples came to see that he wasn't just any ordinary person, or even an ordinary prophet, but we came to see that he was the Messiah, the chosen one of Israel. Last Sabbath when we entered into Jerusalem and the whole city was out singing his praises, we thought his time had come, and that we would see him seated in his rightful place.

What happened next has bewildered all of us, and we have no words to describe our horror...our grief... *(pause)*

It was unthinkable, and yet it happened. *(pause)*

There are things I would wish undone, and things I did not do, that I wish I could ... *(pause)*

But what is done is done. We know now that Jesus is buried behind a stone a foot thick. No one can hurt him now, which is about the only comfort we have in this dark time.

I can only say today that Jesus was a Saviour to me ... he showed me the way to live, and I will never forget it. My friends and I are heading back to Capernaum shortly, but we are not heading back as the same people who left three years ago. Jesus has changed us.

If there was one thing Jesus would want, it would be that we should love one another, and take care of each other in our grief. Mary, I know how hard it was for you to give up your son to his travelling life. He missed Nazareth, too. But he did what he was called to do, and I know you knew from the beginning that he had a special calling, a special life. And I'm glad to see that John is taking care of you now.

I just ask that for all of us, as we go from here, we not just go our own way, but that we look out for each other, that we love one another, as Jesus loved us.

Hymn: STJ 105 - *Don't be afraid*

Tribute – by Mary Magdalene, friend

I remember the first time I met Jesus. I had been lost for some years, possessed by demons – and not myself. I hardly recall that time at all. But the first clear memory I have is of a man holding my hand and calling my name. I looked into his eyes, and I felt such love and acceptance from him ... he just radiated that type of love.

After that I followed Jesus, along with a number of other women. He had started his tour of Israel then. We followed Jesus as our Teacher, from place to place. Jesus was someone who loved people, he loved to meet people, he loved to hear their stories and he loved to help them, in whatever way he could. And people flocked to see him, they couldn't get enough of him.

Sometimes we would travel ahead to a place he was going, and let people know he was on his way. Crowds of people would greet him as he came into town, along with all the sick, hobbling along or being carried. Jesus would heal them and he would teach them.

I remember once Jesus was out on a hillside teaching, and he told us how we were blessed by God; as the poor, as those who mourn, as those who are hungry, as those who long for peace. His heart went out to the crowd, to us, and we knew he spoke with the authority of God. When we were hungry, he could feel our hunger, and he fed us. Our spirits and our stomachs ... he always anticipated our needs.

And he showed us that God cared about everyone, not just the rich, not just the well-educated, or the powerful, but everyone. We had travelled across the Sea to the place of the Gadarenes. And there was a man there who was out of his mind, the kind of man you would walk a kilometre to avoid, he was naked and screaming, an obvious lunatic! Peter and the other men who were rowing changed direction when they saw him screaming on the shore, but Jesus told them "no." We would aim for him, we would land our boat right next to him. It was Jesus who eagerly got out of the boat, went to the man and spoke to him ... we stayed where we were. In a few minutes, Jesus had that man clothed and seated and listening in his right mind to everything Jesus had to say.

Or another time, there was a woman who had been caught in adultery, and she was brought before Jesus by the authorities. She was a test, a test case ... what would he say about this person who had obviously broken the law. I can still picture it ... the woman in a heap on the ground, all the men, righteous and angry, standing with stones in their hands, ready to punish, waiting for Jesus to say the word. Jesus just crouched down beside the woman; he stayed like that for a long time, just writing on the sand. When he spoke he said, "Let he who is without sin, throw the first stone." One by one, starting with the oldest, they dropped their rocks and turned away. Jesus was left sitting on the ground with the woman. I can still see her face, as she looked up from the ground, and saw that none of her accusers remained. She looked in Jesus' face, and I know what she saw there. He told her to go in peace, and to sin no more.

He taught us about the kingdom and about how we are part of it, how we are part of this coming kingdom. Just a few weeks ago Jesus was invited to the home of one of the Pharisees, and a woman came in. And people knew - by the way she looked - that this was an unfortunate woman, a woman who had known much grief in her life. She had taken all she owned and purchased an alabaster flask of perfume. She poured it on Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. I can still smell the fragrance that filled the whole house. Some protested, thinking what a waste of money that was, but I still remember Jesus' words. He said that she had anointed him for his burial. At the time we didn't know what he meant, but now I see that he knew this was coming. The whole time we were heading to Jerusalem, he knew where it would end.

I can't really find words today to say what Jesus meant to me. I have left everything to follow him. I believe he was the chosen one of God. We followed him right to the end; we saw the death that was laid on him by Pilate. A death that no one should have to endure, least of all a man as pure and guiltless as Jesus. It is a cruel world we live in. We are born into suffering, and Jesus himself tasted all of it.

Now we too bear our suffering, our grief. I don't know how we will go on without him. I would give anything to see him again, I would fall at his feet and tell him what he meant to me. But now that chance is gone, and it seems like the world has grown dark.

What I will try to do now is put one foot in front of the other, and go on. Remember what Jesus taught us, remember how he walked and lived and talked; that is the way I want to live. God give us strength to not forget Jesus of Nazareth, and may the God of peace be with him.

Hymn: HWB 430 - *God be with you till we meet again*

Closing Prayer & Benediction:

Our service for Jesus is coming to an end, join me in a final prayer, let's stand together:

God thank you for being with us in this wondering moment
where we stand poised between life and death,
filled to the brim with sorrow,
filled with thoughts of what has been
and what lies before us.
Thank you for the gift of life.
Thank you for our friend Jesus
who was a gift to the world,
a gift in each of our lives.
Comfort us even as we are shaken by the horror of these last hours.
Be our friend in this time of sorrow,
and sustain us in the days to come.

Now Jesus, may God bless you and keep you,
May the very face of God shine upon you, and be gracious to you,
May God's presence embrace you and give you eternal peace.

Amen.