



**Mennonite
Church
Canada**

Resource Centre

From our Churches

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Jesus and the Adversary **A Dialogue for Maundy Thursday or Good Friday**

Hymn 530 HWB "What wondrous love is this?"

(Two people standing on either side of a large cross, one all in black, the other in white shirt and jeans, bare foot if possible. The altar should have a communion cup and a plate of broken bread on it, six lit candles (the six candles of Lent), and one unlit Christ candle.)

Each scripture reader will have one symbol to carry forward and put on the altar: a piece of rope, a handful of coins, a Bible, a length of purple cloth, a crown of thorns, three nails.)

Adversary: Such a nice little dinner party. But in the end, what did it accomplish? What does it ever accomplish? You think that by drinking a little wine and sharing a crust of bread you can somehow reach them? Make them into something better? Convince them to love each other? They're guilty you know. All of them. They sat down to dinner with you, but really they are mine.

Jesus: So you've said. Many times. But you forget, they choose their own Master. They have always had that freedom. And you choose to forget in whose image they were made. You choose to forget that in the beginning, when they were created, male and female, God called them good. God loved them then. God loves them now. God waits for them to come home, even the most lost of them. And I come to lead them to God.

Scripture Reading:

Mark 14: 26-42, 46-52, 66-72 *(Throws down rope on the altar; blows out the first candle)*

Adversary: So you say that God calls them home and you lead them back? They sure didn't follow you then, did they? And these were the ones you called friends? Dogs have more loyalty. These students of yours were courageous when faith was just words and they could enjoy the perks of following on your heels. But when it comes right down to it, they love their skins more than they love you. Their convictions are paper thin. They're cowards – every one of them – leaving their teachers and friends behind in the dark and hoping that the soldiers grab the others and not them. They're not yours. They're mine.

Jesus: Who knows their own strength until it is tested? And I knew how hard they would be tested. I knew that they would fail. Who knows how to be brave, better than the one who knows what it means to give into fear? I knew that the lessons they learned in that failure would be driven into their hearts and their memories like the nails were driven into my hands. Loyalty and sacrifice need to be learned and so I taught them. By example. They will never forget that I gave myself up for them. They will never forget that I walked into the hands of death for them, that I gave myself up to show them the depth of the love of God. They will never forget that they were loved that much. They will remember: “This is my blood spilled for you. This is my body broken for you.”

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 26:14-16, 47-50; Matthew 27: 3-5 (*Throws down coins on the altar; blows out the second candle*)

Adversary: Was this one worth breaking your body for? Look at him! He's a thief, taking the hard earned money of others out of the common purse. He's a self serving, hypocritical betrayer of the worst kind. He led your enemies straight to you and betrayed you with a kiss. And in the end he was too cowardly to face what he had done and chose suicide. Not even you can defend this one. Even you can't forgive the unforgivable.

Jesus: Can I forgive the unforgivable? And is he unforgivable? By whose standards? I came to save the lost, the ones too far gone to be healed by any other means. I ate with tax collectors and prostitutes and soldiers. I touched the lepers. I'm very familiar with the company of the 'unforgivable'. You think that they're yours, but I went looking for them, to eat with them and speak with them and serve them. I died between two thieves. I died **for** the thieves. I tell you now that I went to death to show God's boundless grace for the least and the worst. Could I do any less for Judas?

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 26:1-5, 57-68 (*Throws down Bible on the altar; blows out the third candle*)

Adversary: They used your own words to condemn you. They took the living Word and used the printed word to send him to death. They called your teachings heresy and blasphemy. They used words of life to kill. Is this not the ultimate insult to God? That they used God's word to torment and judge and kill? These ones,

above all, must be your enemies, enemies of your kingdom. And so they must be residents of mine, forever.

Jesus: You have heard it said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Love your enemies, bless those who curse you. Bless them and do not curse them... Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing.

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 27:1-2, 11-26 (*Lays down purple cloth on the altar; blows out the fourth candle*)

Adversary: Don't you just love politics? So easily washing their hands of all responsibility. Selling out the innocent for a momentary peace, a political expediency, to keep power for just one more day. The Pharaohs have always been mine, ordering the death of other people's children with barely a thought. Starving the rebellious into submission. Building the peace of their empires on the graves of the innocent. The kingdoms of the world have always been more mine than yours. Admit it. These ones are truly mine.

Jesus: I grieve that the temptations of power cripple the best of them. I faced the same temptations they do, the temptation to buy the mob with bread and favours, to rule the world by the sword for its own good. They too are offered the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worshipping the way of violence and death. And still, there are the ones who pause to ask "What is truth?" Who stop and use their powers to bring true justice, who try to rule their people and not lose their souls. The choice has always been theirs. They are no more yours than any other human being is.

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 27: 27-37 (*Lays down crown of thorns on the altar; blows out the fifth candle*)

Adversary: And the soldiers? If death and violence are the scales you use to weigh souls, than really these ones have always belonged to me. Their reason for being is dealing death, taking what isn't theirs, taking slaves, creating nightmares in broad daylight. Cruelty and misery is their profession. Not even you can redeem them. Not even you can wash away the blood on their hands.

Jesus: I remember the Centurion who begged for the life of his servant. I remember the one who stood at the foot of the cross as I was dying and saw me for who I truly was. These ones above all know what it means to face death, who cry in terror in the endless moments before a battle, who know what it means to give their lives for their friends. And in those moments of fear and death, is it **your** name they call out to, pray to? Are they really yours?

Scripture Reading:

Mark 15: 25-41 (*Nails and hammer laid on the altar; blows out the sixth candle*)

Adversary: There are no innocent bystanders – those who stood by and watched. They didn't raise a hand to stop it, not one of them. They cried, but they made sure to keep their distance, didn't they? They might as well have built the crosses or driven in the nails. Can you really say that they are yours, these ones who watched you and a thousand other criminals get dragged along the streets to die outside the city walls? Can you really forgive the ones who turn their faces away and pretend that only the guilty die on crosses, that a judgement of guilt deserves its cruelty? Are these self righteous ones worth dying for? Can you really call them yours?

Jesus: Even though they were afraid, they took me down in the darkness and washed my body. They lent me a grave. It was the only protest they were allowed to make. And even for those who watched me walk by with a shrug, I died for them. I walked for them. Every step I took was a call for them to turn and look at the suffering and not turn away. To see that the one on the cross is their neighbour, their brother, their sister. Every step I took is a reminder that not only the guilty are condemned. Every step I took is a reminder that even the guilty are worthy of mercy and my forgiveness.

Adversary: In the end, was it worth it? All that pain? All that sacrifice? Was it worth what you gave to them, gave up for them? They forget so easily! They forget what you taught. They ignore or twist it or rationalize it away. Can even you be so foolish as to forgive them? Can even you give grace to beings like these? Admit it. Admit that I've won. That they are guilty and that they belong in my kingdom, not yours. ... You're out of candles it seems.

Jesus: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form and empty, and darkness covered the face of the abyss, while the breath of God moved upon the face of chaos. Then God said: Let there be light; and there was light. (*Lights the Christ candle that has been unlit until now*)

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life. I am the resurrection and the life. Those who trust in me, even though they die, will live and everyone who lives and trusts in me will never die. My kingdom is mine and the boundaries of it are not yours to define. God's grace is not yours to control or dispense. Scattered as they are, they are still mine, my sheep for whom I shepherd. As long as one of them is missing in the wilderness, I will search. And it will always be worth it.

Adversary: How can you say that? How can it possibly be worth it? How can they possibly be worth it?

Jesus: For the same reason it has always been worth it: They are loved. God loves them. All of them. Speaking of light, can you see it?

Adversary: What?

Jesus: Dawn is coming... I need to be going. And so do you...