**Pilgrim Uniting Church**

**GATHERING**  
Today is one of the grey areas of the Christian year:   
a day when the lights are dimmed   
and the sky feels overcast even if it isn’t:   
a day when theologians and poets feel   
as if a heavy veil is drawn over heart and mind.   
An inexplicably sad day.

We resist the grey areas,   
prefer to see everything in black and white,   
look for cloudless, sunny skies,

try not to read between the lines;

throw in a bright colour or two

to try and enliven the scene.

In the grey light of early morning -

after a night in the ecclesiastical high court,

and denial by one of his own circle -

Jesus found himself at the gates

of the reluctant Pilate, who promptly

tried to hand him back to the Jews.

And though the sun rose that morning,

the whole world turned grey for One

who found himself without friend or helper,

faced with drinking a cup he’d prayed

would be turned away from him,

knowing that life was about to be drained out of him.

We are invited to accompany Jesus through this grey day:

to be witnesses to his suffering,

to keep silence before his cry of dereliction.

In our imaginations, let us trudge through Jerusalem,

until we come to the place of the Cross:

and then, let us not turn our faces away.

In this grey day lie all the sorrows and failings

of a humanity that strives for high success,

yet comes up against human limitations,

and falls to the ground in despair.

A humanity whose peace plans

give way to guns, and whose political promises

become papers in filing cabinets.

Here is a day marked by the brokenness of the world.

But it is not a day to wallow in misery,

or to indulge in morbid thoughts about the crucifixion.

It is simply a somber, dignified day

when we remember how it was for Jesus,

and find at the foot of the cross

a place to lay down ours and the world’s sorrow.

On grey days it is hard to see clearly,

difficult to understand things that aren’t clear.

Yet all we are asked to do today is to be present

to the sacred story as it is retold, and

to the inexplicable, mysterious, wondrous

transaction that was, and still is taking place. (Ann Siddall)

So it is in that humble hope that we come to worship on this Good Friday

believing that life conquers death, joy conquers despair,

hope conquers fear, and love conquers evil. *(Ann Siddall)*

Hymn 114 O come and mourn with me awhile

**Reflection 1:**

*The garden – a place of sanctuary, renewal, regeneration.*   
*But here - in this garden - there is betrayal, violence and abandonment.*

**Reading 1**: **The arrest of Jesus** (John 18: 1-14)

*Silence for reflection*

We find ourselves in this story.   
**Lord, have mercy.**

*A candle is extinguished*

Choir Hear my prayer Henry Purcell 1659-1695

**Reflection 2:**  
*The welcoming warmth of the fire – a place where strangers become friends, and stories are shared.*  
*But here, truth dissipates into the darkness, and courage gives way to denial.*

**Reading 2: Peter denies Jesus** (John 18: 15-18; 25b-27)

*Silence for reflection*

We find ourselves in this story.   
**Lord, have mercy.**

*A candle is extinguished*

**Reflection 3:**   
*Authority and power – the imperative to protect and serve the common good.*   
*But here - with these religious leaders - power is used to protect the privileged.*

**Reading 3: Jesus before the religious leaders** (John 18: 19-24; 28-32)

*Silence for reflection*

We find ourselves in this story.   
**Lord, have mercy.**

*A candle is extinguished*

HYMN 100 Ah, holy Jesu

**Reflection 4:**   
*Authority and power – an opportunity for truth-telling and wise decisions.*   
*But here - with this political leader - truth proves too demanding.*

**Reading 4: Jesus before Pilate** (John 18: 33-40; 19: 1-3)

*Silence for reflection*

We find ourselves in this story.   
**Lord, have mercy.**

*A candle is extinguished*

**Reflection 5:**   
*We proudly profess sublime and noble principles, but on the other hand we sadly practice the antithesis of these principles. We make our fervent pleas for the high road of justice, and then we tread unflinchingly the low road of injustice. This strange dichotomy, this agonizing gulf between the ‘ought’ and the ‘is’, represents the tragic theme of humanity’s earthly existence.*  
*(Martin Luther King Jr, Strength to Love).*

**Reading 5: Jesus is sentenced to death** (John 19: 4-16a)

*Silence for reflection*

We find ourselves in this story.   
**Lord, have mercy.**

*A candle is extinguished*

Choir God so loved the world Bob Chilcott b. 1955

**Reflection 6:**   
*Jesus endured humiliation and violence on the cross and yet he possesses the spiritual stature to look beyond his pain and death to the needs of others. He affirms the fabric of relatedness. He calls his mother to care for the beloved disciple, and he calls the beloved disciple to take responsibility for his mother’s well-being. Death does not end our relationships; it transforms them. Jesus’ care for his mother serves as a model for our own legacy to future generations. Perhaps, Jesus’ words to this generation, our generation, might be: Behold this good earth; take care of your mother. Behold the children in pain; bless them with your love and justice-seeking.*

**Reading 6: The Crucifixion** (John 19: 16b-27)

*Silence for reflection*

We find ourselves in this story.   
**Lord, have mercy.**

*A candle is extinguished*

HYMN 120 O Sacred head, surrounded

**Reflection 7:**   
*‘It is finished’. In the midst of life, we are surrounded by death. The leaves are falling around us through days growing everand more barren. Surrounded by little deaths, the drying of the grass and shrivelling of the flowers, we gather our lives in like the harvest. Our friendships, our experiences, our achievements, we wrap around ourselves, against the coldness which is to come. For in this time, our lives will be lived within. Come, Spirit of Mysteries, into the centre of our containment. Grow treasure from within us. Adapted from Trisha Watts.* ***Sanctuary.******Where Heaven Touches Earth****.*

**Reading 7**: **It is finished** (John 19: 28-37)

*Silence for reflection*

We find ourselves in this story.   
**Lord, have mercy.**

*A candle is extinguished*

Choir The Ninth Hour Bruce Stewart (2003)

**Reflection 8:**   
*We return to a garden. A garden of deathliness. Rocks and stones watered by tears. No fragrance of flowers only the spices of death fill the air. May we look upon deathliness, feel its hard, rocky surface beneath our feet, smell its presence …. and yet also know that even here we find the love of God.*   
  
**Reading 8:** In the burial garden (John 19: 38-42)

*Silence for reflection*

We find ourselves in this story.   
**Lord, have mercy.**

*A candle is extinguished*

**REFLECTION**

**PRAYERS**  
God of life, God of beginnings and endings,

today we pause to remember the power of death.  
Today we tell the story of what happens

when someone angers those in power.  
Today we tell a story of betrayal by a friend,

trial by empire,

execution as a way of silencing the one who names injustice.  
Today we tell a story that happened long ago in a land far away.  
Today we tell a story that continues to happen today in places close at hand.

As we remember the story today help us to see its truth.  
As we tell of Jesus' trial and execution,

remind us of those who are found legally guilty

for doing and saying the right things.  
As we tell of the friends who are conspicuously absent from the cross,

remind us how easily we slip away

when the struggle for justice becomes dangerous or challenging.  
As we look at the cross,

remind us of the power of empire in any age,

and remind us of our duty as people of faith to proclaim a different empire,

a different kingdom, a new way of living together.

God of endings, today we hear the agonized words “It is finished”.

Today we think of all those things that are stopped before they

come to fruition,

of hopes crushed beneath reality's heavy foot,

of promises left unfulfilled,

of possibilities that leave us wondering....

God of life and death, beginnings and endings,

today we pause to remember the power of those in charge to run the world.  
Today we remember the many people near and far who are broken

by that power:  
those who live in places where peace is just a word,

not a reality, not even a dream;  
those who are pushed to the margins

because of their race, their gender, their bank balance,

their marital status, their orientation,

or any of the countless other ways we find to set people apart;  
those who live with nothing so that others may live with abundance  
those who choose to challenge the injustices in their world

and are crushed beneath the feet of those in charge

*A silence is kept*

But even as we remember that power,

we remember that day follows night,

hope replaces despair,

and life will conquer death.

Help us remember that every ending is a new beginning,

even if in the depths of The End

we have no way of seeing what that new beginning might be.  
We pray in the name of the one who showed us

the depth of his passion for your reign,

who taught us to live in love and justice,

and who taught his friends to pray by saying: (Rev Gord, Worship Offerings)

THE LORD’S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven,**

**Hallowed by your name,**

**Your kingdom come,**

**Your will be done,**

**On earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins**

**As we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial**

**And deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours**

**Now and for ever. Amen.**

*Silence for reflection*

*A candle is extinguished*

HYMN 127 When I survey the wondrous cross

POSTLUDE Ecce lignum crucis Anton Heiller 1923-1979

(Behold the wood of the cross)