

in the big love living liturgies

“Women of the Passion” Holy Week Worship Service Script

prepared by Rev. Kathryn M. Schreiber

PREPARATION

ROLES/OUTFITS

- *Musician/s: hymn accompaniment and solos; slot for one anthem provided.*
- *Worship Leader: Minister and Lay Leader/s may share these responsibilities.*
- *Six Readers: Narrator, High Priest’s Maid, Claudia, Veronica, Mary Mother of Jesus, and Mary the Magdalene - best if six different persons, but could be fewer.*
- *Co-Celebrants: Pair/s of mobile females (one team or more) to deliver communion elements.*
- *Participants: Please wear black or dark clothing. Clergy may wear black or robes with no stoles. May add props such as Veronica’s cloth to wipe Christ’s face.*

SET UP & PROPS

- *If your Altar is against the wall or away from the people, you may want to set up a table closer to the congregation.*
- *Altar: Undraped or with black or purple fabric swag.*
- *Candles: one unlit “Christ Candle” (special in some way); two unlit Altar Candles; five unlit Women’s Candles; Lighter/s and Candle Snuffer.*
- *Communion Elements (set up for taking elements TO the people).*
- *Instrument for making a long tone (Tibetan Prayer Bowl, piano, guitar).*
- *Container holding anointing oil, cloth (napkins), and flower petals.*

CONTENT

*Please feel free to change any content to fit the needs of your community.
FYI: This service is designed for evening. Please adjust for morning use.*

We Gather

Prelude (*Musician*)

Music should be meditative, instrumental; spirituals or familiar hymns

Greeting (*Worship Leader*)

Good evening. Welcome to ... *[name of congregation]*...

Tonight we're telling the story of Christ's Passion differently. Using Biblical passages, a Christian legend, part of a medieval Passion Play, and contemporary reflections we will tell the story from the perspective of the women who were there with Jesus during His Passion. We don't have these women's personal testimonies. We do have the records kept by the men who knew them. We have the shadows cast by these real women of faith. Tonight, those shadows come to life embodied by women/people of this congregation. (*cont'd*)

Tonight, we accompany Jesus through His Passion
with courageous, lively, and unforgettable women
as a people with our own challenges -
in our households, throughout Christ's Church,
around the world, among creatures sharing one precious planet.
Tonight, may these women's bright examples of living faith speak to us.

Worship Leader goes to The Christ Candle on the Altar.

Invocation

These women were there when others were not.
They were there for Jesus.
He was their Christ.
Praise be to Christ their Light.

Worship Leader lights The Christ Candle.

Hymn

"Were You There?"

WERE YOU THERE/African-American Spiritual

Congregation remains seated for hymns. Sing four verses:

- 1) Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
- 2) Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree? . . .
- 3) Were you there when they pierced Him in the side? . . .
- 4) Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? . . .

Worship Leader: Were you there?
Female Readers: We were there.

We Share the Meal

Invitation to Communion

Worship Leader goes to the Altar.

Worship Leader:

Christ's Passion begins at the Passover Table.
A table in a room cleaned and tended... by women.
A table set with items cleaned and tended... by women.
A table holding a meal prepared and served... by women.
And upon each Passover Seder table,
upon any household's Seder table,
you will find two candlesticks.
They represent the two great lights in the sky -- the sun and the moon.
These two candles are always lit... by women.

Worship Leader (or a designed woman) lights the two Altar Candles.

Here, among Christians, the Seder Table becomes Jesus' Table.
At this Table all are equally invited.
If you desire to partake of this meal -- you are welcome! (*cont'd*)

Explain:

- *elements (may describe --non-alcohol, gluten-free, organic)*
- *delivered to you tonight (women will serve the elements)*
- *consume the elements when you receive them*

Each Friday night as the sun sets the weekly Seder begins with a Jewish woman lighting candles, and then praying at her table before the meal is shared. Tonight, let us pray with them.

Pastoral Prayer (*Worship Leader*)

Blessed Art Thou, O Lord, God, Sovereign of the Universe,
You sanctify us with Your Commandments,
and command us to kindle the light of this holiday. (1)

In Sacred Light, on this Holy Night we ask a blessing upon all people of faith who are gathered to remember Your faithfulness to us and our people.

On this Holy Night, we name our compliance, known and unknown, for the pain and harm others have known.
Forgive us for our private and corporate sins,
but do not take away the appropriate shame that is ours.
Let us feel Your dissonance when we have hurt others,
Let us hear Your call to attempt reconciliation,
to make repairs, and with Your help, to create Peace.

Forgive us, Holy One, for bringing so many laments to You.
You are already aware of each and every moment of suffering,
but we have a need to lay these burdens before You.
Thank You for receiving our prayers.

As a nation, we lift up the quieted truth of our ongoing wars...
[specific concerns]...

We pray for all impacted by war,
admitting that our soldiers and their families
receive uneven care in the field and here at home, too.

We lift up our fear of others, including immigrants and refugees,
upon whose labors and gifts we benefit.

We pray for all persons in our prisons and detention sites...
[specific concerns]...

Show us how to craft civil protection that does not violate civil rights.

As global citizens, we lift up prayers for the well-being and safety of the peoples and beings around the world, including...
[specific concerns]... (cont'd)

We know You have heard our concern about the economy.

Amid our supplications, speak to us of moral practices,
of just priorities, of realistic expectations...

[specific concerns]...

Bless us with more basic civility and respect for each other, too.

On this Holy Night, we lift up prayers
for Your Church Universal in its myriad expressions.

Selfishly, in this Holy Darkness, we name our fears
for our denomination and for churches.

Are we serving You?

Grant to us what is needed at this time to be faithful, true and hopeful.

Bless our religious leaders...

[names of regional ministers]...

and all who serve You this Holy Week.

May our worship bring You glory.

Responsive God,

Already, You are attending to the sick, the lonely, those with other needs.

Already, You care about those matters weighing heavily on our hearts.

Thank You for Your eternal care.

In the safe shelter of silence, we offer our personal prayers to You...

... [hold silence for a long while - this is a night of very deep prayer]...

O Lord, Hear our Prayers. **Amen.**

Words of Institution (*Worship Leader*)

We remember that evening when Jesus and his Disciples
were gathered around a borrowed table.

A table used weekly for Sabbath prayers and meal.

But this week it was Passover in Jerusalem.

And this year it was a time of heightened sensitivity.

Great was the need for alliance with God.

Great was the need for guidance from God,

so with his dear friends assembled around that blessed, borrowed table...

Jesus took The Bread, mostly likely baked by a woman...

He lifted it up to You, O God, for blessing... (*lift Bread*)

He broke it ... (*break Bread*)

and He gave it to his beloved friends, saying:

“Take, eat.

This is my body, which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.”

Likewise, after supper, Jesus took the Cup, filled with wine
made from grapes most likely picked and mashed by women... (*fill Cup/s with juice*) (*cont'd*)

This, too, He lifted it up to You, O God, for blessing... *(lift Cup)*

And He shared it with the Beloved, saying:

“Drink this, all of you.

This is my blood of the new covenant,
which is poured out for you, and for many,
for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me.”

Sharing the Loaf *(optional)* (2)

These gifts are given to be shared.

Tonight we share this meal with those who cannot be physically present.

We set aside this piece of bread for....

(tear off a piece of bread)... for those who come to this table in spirit;

(tear off a piece of bread) ...for those in our hearts who can't attend tonight;

(tear off a piece of bread) ...for our neighbors seeking a faith home who,
if it pleases God, one day will worship here.

Serving the Meal

The gifts of God for the people of God.

Come, for all things are ready.

Will the Co-Celebrants please come forward?

Musician: Solo

Co-Celebrants (pairs of women) take the elements to everyone including Musician.

Return to the Altar to serve each other and Worship Leader.

Tidy Altar leaving broken Bread and one Cup covered with Christ Candle in the center.

Surround with five unlit Women's Candles. Extinguish two Altar Candles.

Prayer of Thanksgiving *(Worship Leader)*

Let us pray:

From the moment of conception to our last breathe,

O Living God, we are dependent upon You

and those who serve You.

On this sacred night, at this holy Table,

we give thanks for the women who have loved Jesus the Christ,

who tended him in life, death, and resurrection.

Thank You for the many gifts of nourishment

provided in this meal. We are grateful.

Receive the deep prayers of our souls

as we again surrender to silence,

to pray with You in private, together...

[silence]...

From our personal prayers, *(cont'd)*

rejoin us as a community -
 one newly prepared to hear the Living Story of Your Love for us,
 manifest in Jesus Christ's Passion. Amen.

*Worship Leader sits down if not performing in the role of Narrator.
 Worship Leader to the pulpit if serving in the role of Narrator.*

We Witness and Accompany

The High Priest's Maid: A Woman of Honesty

Narrator and High Priest's Maid please come up front and sit down.

Narrator:

Jesus has been betrayed -
 insider information bought for thirty silver coins.
 The Roman officials have come to the Garden
 where Jesus and some of his followers had prayed and rested.
 Jesus is apprehended and brought before the Jewish authorities,
 assembled at the home of the High Priest Caiaphas
 to press their case against Jesus.
 It is sometime between midnight and dawn.
 As they put Jesus on trial
 his male disciples are milling around in the outer courtyard
 trying to remain inconspicuous.
 However, a female servant of Caiaphas notices
 one of Jesus' followers.

*Narrator/Worship Leader sits down.
 High Priest's Maid goes to the pulpit.*

High Priest's Maid:

I saw him, the one called Peter, in the courtyard.
 He was warming himself by the fire.
 So I said to him, "You were also with Jesus the Nazarene."

The one called Peter vehemently denied it.
 He said to me, "I have no idea what you mean."

A while later I saw him on the porch.
 So I told the people standing nearby,
 "This man is one of them!"
 But again, the one called Peter denied it.
 Eventually, the people said to him
 "Surely, you are one of their company -- your accent is Galilean."

The one called Peter began to curse and swear
 and answered with an oath:
 "I do not know this man." (Meaning his teacher, Jesus.) (*cont'd*)

I remember that moment well because a cock crowed.
I turned in the direction of the sound
and when I turned back
the one called Peter had begun to weep.

Almost no one knows my name.
Yet, I am maid to the High Priest of the Temple in Jerusalem.
I questioned the one named Peter, a follower of Jesus.
I was there.

*High Priest's Maid please go to the Altar and light one unlit candle.
Return to your seat among the congregation.*

Hymn "There is a Balm in Gilead"

BALM IN GILEAD/African-American Spiritual
Congregation remains seated for hymns. Sing two verses:

- 1) Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain...
- 2) Don't ever feel discouraged, for Jesus is your friend...

Claudia, the Governor's Wife: A Woman of Perception

Claudia, the Governor's Wife please come up front and sit down.

Narrator:

In those days only one person had legal authority
to pronounce the sentence of death --
that was the pro-curator of Judea: Pontius Pilate -
the Roman Governor of Judea.

All four gospel accounts indicate that
Pilate did not think Jesus was guilty.
The Governor kept trying to release him.

In three of the gospels Barabbas is offered as a substitute;
each time, the people reject him.

Only in the gospel of Matthew do we meet Pilate's wife
whom history suggests was named Procula
or possibly Claudia Procles.

Christian tradition names her Claudia.

Only in Matthew does Claudia appear.

And only in this gospel does Pilate wash his hands
of any guilt regarding the death of Jesus.

Narrator sits down.

Claudia, the Governor's Wife goes to the pulpit.

Claudia, the Governor's Wife:

It was morning.

The business of the day had begun.

Leaders of the local religious community arrived bringing with them (*cont'd*)

someone to put before my husband for judgment.
 When I learned that the man in custody was Jesus,
 the one some say is the Jewish Messiah,
 I was startled.
 The night before I'd had a powerful dream about him.

Quickly, I sent a servant with a warning to my husband Pilate.
 I sent this message to him:
 "Have nothing to do with that innocent man.
 I have been upset all day because of a dream I had about him."

It was the week of the big Jewish festival.
 Custom authorized the Governor to release one prisoner for the festival.
 The people were completely free to select someone to be released.
 They could have picked anyone. Anyone.
 They could have picked Jesus, but they didn't.

The Temple high priests and top elders were jealous of Jesus.
 They knew that a notorious prisoner named Barabbas was in custody.
 So, the religious leaders persuaded their people
 to choose Barabbas, instead of Jesus, for release.

The voices in the courtyard rose up into my rooms...
 The crowd cried out, "Barabbas!"
 after my husband asked which prisoner they wished released.

And then, a little later, those same voices rose again,
 now calling out against Jesus, saying:
 "Crucify him!" "Let him be crucified!"

My husband Pilate was afraid.
 He sent for water.
 Before those assembled he washed his hands, telling them,
 "I am innocent of the blood of this man.
 The responsibility is yours."

In the end, Barabbas was released.
 Jesus, the one some called the Christ, was scourged
 and his crucifixion was ordered.

I am Claudia Procles, wife of the Governor of Judea.
 I tried to stop the execution of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah.
 I was there.

*Claudia, the Governor's Wife please go to the Altar and light one unlit candle.
 Return to your seat among the congregation.*

(cont'd)

Veronica: A Woman of Compassion

Veronica please come up front and sit down.

Narrator:

Veronica doesn't appear in the Bible
but she is well known to many Christians
as the woman who used her veil to wipe Jesus' face
while He was carrying His cross to Calvary.

Veronica is mentioned in the obscure "Gospel of Nicodemus."
According to pious legend, the cloth she used
became miraculously imprinted with Jesus' face.
Her name comes from the Latin *vera*, "true," and Greek *icon*, "image."
"Veronica" means "true image."

Narrator sits down.

Veronica goes to the pulpit.

Veronica:

People tell stories about me and Jesus.
I saw Him.
He was on His way to His death.
That's how the Romans did it.
They sentenced you to death
and then made you carry your own cross
uphill to the Place of the Skulls.
So we watched.
We wanted to know what was going on.

That's how I saw Him.
He was carrying His cross... and He looked bad.
There were wounds on His body, all over.
And the thorns on His head,
I'd never seen that before.
Blood, sweat and dirt was on His face.

As I looked at Jesus, looked at His face,
I could tell He was really hurting.
You know how you can see someone else hurting,
and then you start to hurt, too?
That happened to me.
I felt that innocent man's pain.

My heart broke for Him...
for what they were doing to Him.
But, what could I do?
The only thing I could think of was my head scarf, my veil.
So, I pushed through the people and guards.

I went directly to Jesus.
I took off my scarf and wiped his face.

That's all.
Nothing much, really.
Nobody should be telling stories about me.
He's the one we should be talking about.

I am Veronica, a woman in Jerusalem.
All I did was wipe Jesus' face.
But, I was there.

*Veronica please go to the Altar and light one unlit candle.
Return to your seat among the congregation.*

Hymn **“What Wondrous Love is This”**
 WONDROUS LOVE/Appalachian Folk Hymn

Congregation remains seated for hymns. Sing two verses:

- 1) What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!...
- 2) To God and to the Lamb, I will sing, I will sing....

Mary, Mother of Jesus: A Woman of Sorrow

Mary, Mother of Jesus please come up front and sit down.

Narrator:

Of all the women in Jesus' life,
one was more consistently present to Him
throughout His entire lifetime on earth
and as His followers became His Church.
I'm speaking of His mother, Mary.
While different stories are told about Mary
in each of the four canonical gospels,
there are more stories recorded about her
than any other woman in our New Testament.
All agree she was at the cross when her son Jesus was executed.

Mary is the patron saint of those who suffer,
including parents with suffering children.
Tonight, we remember, Mary's suffering is not simply parental.
The man on the cross is God's Messiah.
She grieves the death of her son
and the death of her spiritual leader.

Narrator sits down.

Mary, Mother of Jesus goes to the pulpit.

Mary, Mother of Jesus:

Ignorant before lamentation, (*cont'd*)

I am distressed and worn out with lamentation;
 I am tortured with pain.
 Son, one and only delight, remarkable joy,
 look at your mother weeping,
 and bring her comfort.

Flower of flowers, prince of goodness, vein of forgiveness,
 how heavy against your shoulders is your punishment!
 O true eloquence of just Simeon,
 I feel the sword of grief which he foretold.
 Spare my child, death, do not spare me,
 then me alone, you alone, soothe.

My heart, my mind, my eyes,
 your sounds put to the rack.
 What a mother, what a woman,
 so fortunate -- so wretched!

Woe the pain,
 from here the color of your face flees away,
 from here it rushes down,
 from here it flows a wave of blood.
 O what love has despoiled your body?
 O how sweet the pledge, how bitter the prize!
 Groans, sighs, and tears outside
 are proof of the wound inside.

Spare my son, I pray,
 crucify the mother,
 fasten me on the stock of the cross at the same time,
 unfortunately, he dies alone.

I am Mary, the mother of Jesus.
 I love my son, my Savior.
 In His living and in His dying, I was there.

*Mary, Mother of Jesus please go to the Altar and light one unlit candle.
 Return to your seat among the congregation.*

Anthem or Solo
Meditative music focused upon The Passion

Mary the Magdalene: A Woman of Love
Mary the Magdalene please come up front and sit down.

Narrator:
 There were many Marys in Jesus' life.
 Of all of them, one was his closest female disciple - (cont'd)

the Mary we know as “The Magdalene.”
 Because of her premier role within Jesus’ disciples
 in an era that was most definitely not open
 to female leadership, much less equality,
 she represented a great challenge to her brothers in Christ,
 and probably, to her sisters in Christ, too.

The Magdalene has been refashioned throughout the ages
 to model our own fears and fantasies about women.
 And yet, this very real woman, Jesus’ dear disciple,
 continues to rise among us as a spiritual leader.

Of course, she would... she was there:
 during his ministry, at his death, at his resurrection, and beyond.
 She was the first Easter morning preacher
 and an important religious leader after Jesus’ ascension.

Narrator sits down.
Mary the Magdalene goes to the pulpit.

Mary the Magdalene:
 Jesus was a traveler...
 we went from city to city, village to village,
 preaching the Good News of the reign of God.
 Now, there were men with Him, especially the twelve.
 But there were women who travelled with Him, too.
 Some of the women had been healed -- of evil spirits and infirmities.
 Now, they like to say I used to have seven demons in me,
 that He expelled them all.
 I will tell you this...
 He is a great healer. A great healer.

Among the women were women
 like Joanna, wife of Chuza (Herod’s steward).
 And there was Susanna.
 Many of us had wealth;
 We used our resources to support Jesus
 and the ministries of all his disciples.
 There were family women, too.
 Of course, His mother Mary, and her sister,
 and another Mary, the wife of Clopas,
 and Mary, the mother of Joseph.
 There were a lot of Marys in those days!

We were all different.
 While I was a Mary, too, I was not like the others.
 I was called “Magdalene” for my village,
 but also for my role -- as a tower. (*cont’d*)

He taught me so much...
and encouraged me to teach others.

He, Jesus, is my teacher, my savior, my friend.
He is dear to me.
So, of course, I was there, on that corrupt hilltop of death.

I was there to be with Him,
and to be with the other faithful women who were there.

I am Mary, the Magdalene.
I love Him.
Of course, I was there.

*Mary Magdalene please go to the Altar and light last unlit candle.
Remain at the Altar. Veronica and Mary, Mother of Jesus, join her.
Narrator to the pulpit.*

Death and Entombment of Christ

Narrator:

Upon Calvary at the Cross,
as Jesus' spirit was preparing to leave His body,
women were there with Him as He breathed His last breath.
When He died, they were there.

*Women at the Altar please extinguish the Christ Candle. Use a snuffer.
Leave the five Women's Candles burning. Remain at the Altar.*

Silence

Worship Leader: Signal to Musician to begin.

Musician: Plays a Tibetan singing bowl or sounds a low, single note.

*Women at the Altar: Tenderly anoint pieces of broken bread (Jesus' Body) with oil;
wrap in cloth, cover with flower petals. Return to your seats in the congregation.*

Silence

Musician: Wait for signal from Worship Leader.

Worship Leader: Hold the silence for a while. Signal the Musician.

Hymn

"O Love That Will Not Let Me Go"

ST. MARGARET/George Matheson/Albert L. Peace

Congregation remains seated for hymns. Sing four verses:

- 1) O Love that will not let me go...
- 2) O Light that follows all my way...
- 3) O Joy that seeks me through my pain...
- 4) O Cross that raises up my head...

Worship Leader stands behind The Altar.

Worship Leader:

With the Women at the Cross,

let us affirm our faith on this dark night.

Let us join together in praying the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

Prayer of Faith (*unison*)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,

for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory

for ever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

Worship Leader:

My friends, go forth in peace.

The women who loved Jesus

continue to carry the Light of Christ

while He is in the Tomb. Amen.

Worship Leader exits. No Postlude.

We leave the Sanctuary in silence tonight.

Five Women's Candles remain burning until all have left the Sanctuary.

Worship Resources, Credits:

Original Script and Prayers: Rev. Kathryn M. Schreiber © 2011, revised 2018.

(1) Traditional Jewish Shabbat prayer.

(2) Rev. Barry Crammer used this "shared meal" approach at PSR in the 1990's.

Primary Resources: NRSV of the Holy Bible and WomanWord by Miriam Therese Winter.

** High Priest's Maid: Biblical account*

** Claudia: Mary Busby and Wikipedia*

** Veronica: Heather Johnston in Let Justice Roll Down, lectures by James Finlay, Robert Ellsberg's entry in All Saints, Joan Chittister in The Friendship of Women.*

** Mary, Mother of Jesus: excerpts of a poem from the classical Passion Play "Planctus ante nescia" edited by Gottfried of St Victor.*

** Mary The Magdalene: separate biography is available upon request, with great thanks to devotees of the Magdalene: Cynthia Bourgeault and Mary Busby.*