

in the big love living liturgies

“Weeping Together” • John 11:30-35

Worship Service for In-Home or Remote Group Use

prepared by Rev. Kathryn M. Schreiber

Worship Note

As we continue the selfless practice of Sheltering in Place, as we adapt and welcome new ways of being communities of faith, our souls need special care. This service is one of a series designed to align us with the Living God during these pandemic-impacted times.

Preparations

- You may wish to arrange to worship distantly with others at the same time.
- Read through this service beforehand to assemble items needed.
- A “Christ Candle” can be any sort of candle or object which represents Christ’s presence.
- Choose songs to sing (our suggestions or your favorites). Assemble what you’ll need to sing.
- Ensure an uninterrupted place to worship.
- Decorate your space to welcome God’s presence, as we do at church.

Time for Children

“Out of the Bag: It’s Okay to Cry” on YouTube channel: Kathryn Schreiber

Worship Service

Please adapt to make this worship service your own. Your intention is what is important.

We Gather

Call to Worship

When something must be done - we reach out to Jesus.

When someone is in real need - we reach out to Jesus.

When a problem is too big for us - we reach out to Jesus.

When our sorrow is too great to bear - we reach out to Jesus.

Let us bring our diverse needs to Jesus
each one reaching out to Christ.

All of us gathered in a circle
with Jesus Christ in the center.

May we truly be gathered together
in the hope that is Christ Eternal. Amen.

Light the Christ Candle

Song for Welcoming Christ

Suggestion: “Kum ba Yah” - by Marvin Frey (#590 Chalice)

We Unburden and Gather Hope

Naming Our New Reality

Whether you are alone or with others, let this be a time of private reflection today. Often, we must put on a brave face in the presence of others. Thankfully, we do not need to do this in God’s presence. Trust the safety of divine protection and confidentiality and tell God how it is with you today. You can say anything. God’s listening even if you can’t sense God’s presence.

Silent Prayer

We shift from speaking to God to sitting with God silently. A helpful way to enter sacred silence is to offer this simple prayer based on Psalm 46:10:

Be still and know that I am God. (pause)

Be still and know that I am. (pause)

Be still and know. (pause)

Be still. (pause)

Be. (pause)

Sit quietly in a state of calm devotion. Your mind and feelings will be active; this is natural. With compassion, acknowledge the thoughts and feelings but do not engage them. Practice choosing to refocus on God. Don't worry; we all get distracted. Take a breath and try again. Each time we choose to return to God, gently turning away from our fleeting thoughts, we give God a beautiful gift. Please be kind to yourself. Each act of inner compassion helps us be kinder to others. When you're ready to move on take a moment to thank God and say, "Amen."

Acts of Unburdening and Affirming

Place pebbles or small items at the base of the Christ Candle thinking or speaking whatever you wish to offer to God for release or gratitude. These offerings need not be named. The soul knows what to give to God and God knows what to receive.

Blessing of Grace

The Eternally Compassionate One knows what we are experiencing.

God knows our feelings and thoughts.

God knows the joys and challenges we daily face.

Through it all, God is with us accepting as we are,

joining us in this present moment

offering us a glimpse of eternity.

May we receive these blessings of God's grace:

unending mercy;

complete forgiveness;

never-ending hope. Amen.

We Listen

Scripture Reading: John 11:30-35 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now Jesus had not yet come to the village of Bethany,

but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her,

saw Mary get up quickly and go out.

They followed her because they thought

that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him,

she knelt at his feet and said to him,

'Lord, if you had been here,

my brother would not have died.'

When Jesus saw her weeping,

and the Jews who came with her also weeping,

he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.

Jesus said, 'Where have you laid him?'

They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’

Jesus began to weep.

May God add a blessing to the reading and reflecting upon this Holy Word. Amen.

Reflection Upon “Weeping Together”

(This content is created for private reflection. If your pastor has prepared a written or recorded message you may use it instead or with this material.)

****Special Note: Today’s reflection is focused upon death and loss. If this is an especially tender time for you, you may want to postpone using these materials. Take care. God’s Holy Spirit will guide you to what your soul really needs.****

Today’s scripture reading is a brief portion of a larger story about the death and resurrection of Lazarus of Bethany. As this scene begins, we are with Martha, Mary, and “the Jews who were in the house.” Jewish community friends gathered with Lazarus’s sisters to comfort them in their time of loss. Martha has returned from speaking with Jesus who is on his way to their village. Upon her return, Martha talks with Mary who then quickly leaves the house. Their consoling friends join Mary whom they believe is going to Lazarus’ tomb to weep. As is true today, the grieving sisters are supported by their community of faith.

However, during this time of the COVID-19 coronavirus we are not able to do this physically - to observe our communal death rituals with each other in person. We cannot gather together in private homes or beloved sanctuaries. We can’t huddle together at cemeteries or host memorial meals. Not only are we dealing with the deaths of our loved ones, we’re also grieving the loss of weeping together; of observing our shared ancient religious and cultural practices of bereavement.

We are dealing with a global crisis in a world of shared human losses. If we “widen the lens” on this scripture passage we’ll find that Lazarus’ untimely death was also part of a much larger story of human suffering.

1st Century Palestine was a very dangerous place for young Hebrew men. The life expectancy for Jesus and his peers was only 29-30 years of age. Various factors, including the violence of the Roman Empire, fatally threatened the lives of Jewish males. Every Jewish family, every single one, would have experienced the death of a young man - a son or a brother, a cousin or an uncle, maybe even many such tragic deaths.

Some scholars believe that this environment emboldened young men like John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth to take extremely dangerous risks -- to speak out against corrupt religious institutions and their collusion with the inhumane practices of the Roman Empire. To do so could easily lead to imprisonment and death. Jesus, John, and all their disciples, knew that their days were numbered, so did their mothers. These grieving families had little to lose while they tried to change the world for the future of their society.

The same may be true for populations today with unnaturally high rates of early death. Consider the young men in our area whose lives are at highest risk of untimely death. Who might be growing up knowing they will not become old men? Our vulnerable young ones, like Jesus and his peers, often learn to guard against feeling vulnerable. To open oneself up to grief would be to open the floodgates of pent up tears. Maybe, we’re afraid of weeping, too?

The stories about Jesus and Lazarus of Bethany only appear in the gospel of St John. They were written down two generations after Jesus’ death on the cross. These followers had learned how to hold the paradox of the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ with the dangerous social and political

conditions which remained. It could be that the cause of Lazarus's untimely death was not noted so that we could read our own stories into the text. Who are the young men today who are dying too soon? They have died from the coronavirus, and the opioid epidemic, and the authorized use of lethal force.

As we continue to shelter in place, as cities begin opening up, we must be careful - there are old and new dangers in our midst. Some of us really are more vulnerable than others. And, we must acknowledge that we also suffer from the loss of being together in our grief. Unlike Martha and Mary, we cannot physically gather with our church family. We cannot weep together in a shared space even though our souls ache to do so.

What we can do is to listen to God - the Still Speaking God who is offering wisdom to us in this time of pandemic. God guides us with ideas and inspiration as we find new ways to comfort each other from a distance. How we do things together keeps changing, and sometimes these changes are challenging, but what we continue to do remains the same - loving God, loving others, loving our own souls. We are always in the presence of the Eternal Friend, especially in times of sorrow.

Special Music

Suggestion: "I'll Fly Away" performers: Gillian Welch & Alison Krauss; O Brother, Where Art Thou?
Video: <https://youtu.be/IFamN-oXRMQ>

We Pray

Prayers of Petition

May is filled with graduations and education celebrations which are quite different this year. Let us pray for the achievements of our children, youth, and young adults and their amazing teachers (professionals and parents). Let us continue to pray for inventors of needed medical and social care treatments and technologies. Let us pray for the lonely, the sorrowing, and the dying. If your community shares prayer requests, please include them, as you continue your prayers of petition.

Song for Prayer

Suggestion: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" - J Scriven, CONVERSE (#585 Chalice, #433 HOL)

The Lord's Prayer (unison)

Imagine the sanctuary where you usually worship. Let the memory of your Beloved Community fill your soul and let us pray together the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

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.

We Give Thanks

Offering

Let us give thanks for the people who have taught us in the past, and are teaching right now, how to be Christ's Church in new ways. As we give thanks for them may God help us to perceive how we are using, or could use, our gifts to best embody care and uplift, support and strength to others. (see donation footnote)

Song of Gratitude

Suggestion: "For All the Saints" - WW How, SINE NOMINE (#637 Chalice; #219 HOL)

We Continue in Hope

Song of Hope

Suggestion: "Pues Si Vivimos/When We Are Living" - ES Eslinger, SOMOS DEL SENOR (#536 Chalice)

Benediction

May the peace of God which passes all understanding
 companion us on our various journeys of grief
 as the song of the heavens reminds us
 we shall all be reunited in glory. Amen.

✠ *this concludes the service* ✠

Online Chalice Hymnal: <https://hymnary.org/hymnal/CH1995>

Online New Century Hymnal: <https://hymnary.org/hymnal/NCH1995>

HOL: Hymns of Life, bilingual hymnal. ©1986, China Alliance Press.

YouTube Music Videos: search by title AND one of the authors for best results

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