

Instrumental Music Prelude

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement

As we gather in the name of Jesus we remember and acknowledge with gratitude the Lkwungen people – the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ – on whose traditional and unceded territory we gather. As we remember let us also recommit to reconciling relationships.

Lenten Liturgy

The night and day are dark and difficult.

This man did not deserve to be hit and spat upon – denied, forsaken, mocked.

Crucify him! Crucify him!

This is the hardest part of the journey – Jesus betrayed, arrested, brought before the authorities, tried and condemned. Beaten, rejected, a crown of thorns pressed on his brow, and the crowd chants “Crucify him!”

Crucify him! Crucify him!

Head bowed down, the Lord of life is condemned to die. O Lord, was this for us?

God, forgive us for all the ways we have left you and not followed you and your ways.

It is finished. The temple veil torn. The world is dark. Silence.

Let us pray... **God of truth, keep us from being distracted from following you, until the journey is complete, and death is trampled down by death and eternal life is given to all. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen**

➤ *We come to ask your forgiveness*

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† Prayer for Understanding

O God, our source of wisdom and understanding, in the midst of distractions around us, still our minds to listen. In the midst of competing voices, let us hear your Word. Among the choices that confront us, help us follow your will for the sake of Jesus, our Saviour. Amen

Scripture **Isaiah 52: 13 – 53: 12**

See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as there were many who were astonished at him — so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals — so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.

Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice, he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message ***Turbulent Times*** - the Rev. Cathy Victor

As far as anyone really knows, the earliest image of a crucifixion was a piece of graffiti scratched onto a wall, most likely by a Roman soldier in the 2nd century. The graffiti was a simple picture of a man looking up at another man who had the head of a donkey and was being crucified. It was a mocking piece of graffiti.

The crucifixion was a horrific, as well as baffling event and early Christians had trouble explaining it to themselves, much less to others. Christian art throughout the first three centuries was minimal. The Catacombs did have wonderful symbols to remind Christians of the stories of faith - a dove, an ark, fish, fishermen, sheep with a shepherd - but no Crosses, or crucifixions.

And so, it was kind of like the family secret that they kept to themselves until the Emperor Constantine saw a cross in the sky and promptly won a major battle.

Constantine became a Christian on the spot. Crucifixion was ended and he ordered the Roman Empire to follow suit. And so, the cross became a symbol of Imperial victory.

There were Christian works of art that began to appear, but mostly triumphant visions of the Christian story.

Just how do you portray someone who is fully human and fully divine. How do you show the divine son of God facing death and suffering in a way that is certainly beyond our grasp? What kind of expression do you put on a face like that? How do you depict such excruciating defeat, the worst death ever, unfathomable pain? What do you do with a God who suffers?

Fast forward to the 1500's in Europe. It was the Renaissance. Perhaps Raphael's Madonnas and chubby Angels come to mind, or maybe Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. The serene blues of the skies, the Madonnas robes, a little baby Jesus and all the angel wings you can imagine. Or maybe you think of Leonardo's Mona Lisa, or the Last Supper. Not to mention the creative brilliance Leonardo had in shedding light on myriads of inventions, and in science. Leonardo's work planted seeds that took root in both science and art.

And while that was all blossoming, the Church begins to roil and change.

There were disagreements bubbling up and building layer upon layer of challenges to the Christian faith and how it should be practiced. The Reformation was just about to begin. And then to make matters worse, the Black Death, the Plague made the world a dark and hideous place. People were dying in massive numbers. Anywhere from a third to a half of the population in Europe died, depending on which source you read.

People were emotionally as well as physically affected. It was a time of loss, sorrow and fear, and the landscape of the world was shifting. Does this strike you as a little familiar?

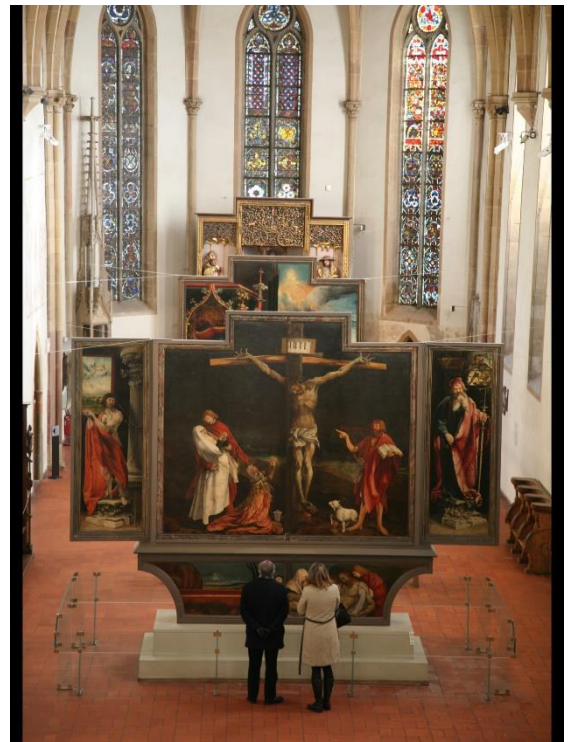
There is a hospital in the north east of France in Isenheim where the artist Matthias Grünewald painted one of the most stunning crucifixions that I can think of. It was a hospital run by the monks of St. Anthony and it was a place to care for those with skin diseases such as leprosy and the Black Death. It was in this setting that Grünewald set out to paint a remarkable work. The Isenheim Altar piece was a stunning creation of visual theology and a tool for meditation.

From 1500 to 1516 Grunewald painted a complicated altar piece there in the hospital chapel surrounded by patients and their families. In the midst of their suffering, he showed a stark and gruesome picture of Christ whose own skin is covered in lesions and wounds. It strikes me as remarkable that he painted it over 6 years in the midst of all of that. But more notably, the painting gives us a picture of Jesus the Son of God who identifies with our own sufferings, our sorrows and whatever we are agonizing with.

It is a meditation on suffering, and on a God who suffers. It is eleven and a half feet tall and fifteen feet wide. It has multiple moving parts, doors that open and close - layered hinged panels revealing numerous paintings and some sculptures as well. It can be taken apart and be displayed as is done in the chapel now...

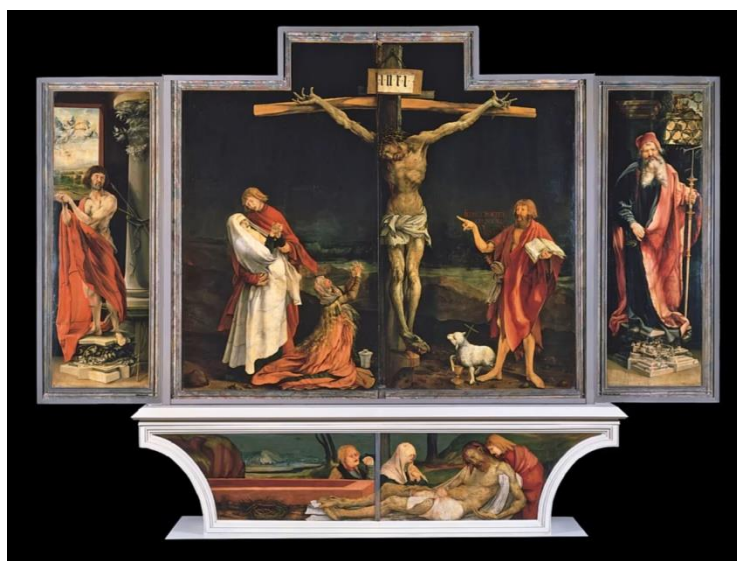
(The chapel picture)

Six days of the week the panels were closed to show only the crucifixion. On Sundays and feast days, other parts were opened to reveal the resurrection or annunciation for example. But it was the crucifixion that was the painting to meditate on in the everyday lives of those who lived there.



It is an honest picture of Jesus taking to himself the pain of the people who would be gazing upon the painting. It is agony in spades. Jesus comes along side each one of us, and aside each one who meditated on that work. Suffering never comes at a good time. It blindsides you and knocks you over and no one is left unscathed.

Suffering and sin is interwoven into the fabric of God's people. We can be so good at trying to hide the pain in our lives, and even from ourselves, and from God. We usually prefer to clean things up, and well, - sanitize them. In our normally polite and tidy lives we are reminded of nails through flesh, screams of pain, slivers of wood, gasps for breath, blood dripping down.



(The crucifixion)

It is the greatest of obscenities that the Son of God is mocked, strung up in public, naked, abandoned by friends, betrayed, and left to think that even God has abandoned him. It is the greatest of obscenities, but the greatest of mysteries that this is how God chose to work a miracle of unprecedented life and love. Our loving Creator is determined to bring new life to an alienated world and to all of God's people. Grunewald's painting shows the darkest of night. It is consuming.

(Close up of John the Baptist)

On the right is John the Baptist, who is depicted as small. He would have already died, but this is a meditation. The Latin says, "He will increase, while I must decrease." The Lamb of God is at his feet with blood dripping into a communion cup, at the foot of the cross. A small symbol of hope in an overwhelming scene. On the left side of the altar piece is the disciple John holding Jesus' mother Mary who is ready to faint.

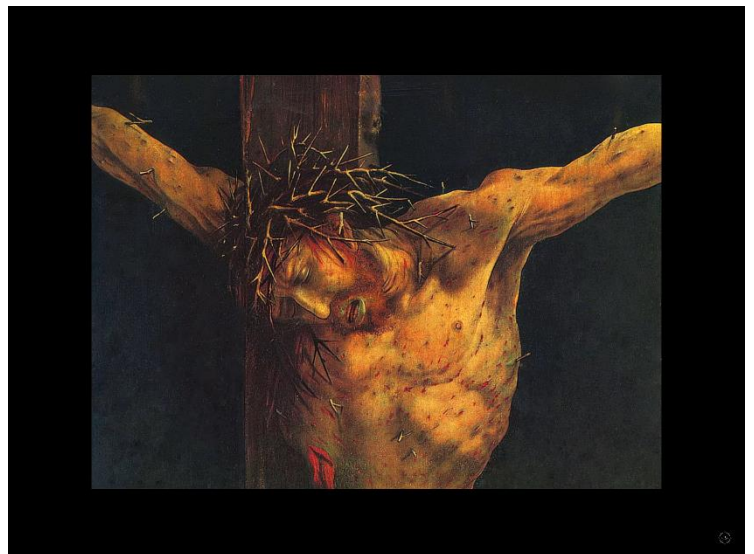


(Mary and John and Mary)

And then there is Mary Magdalene with her alabaster jar that had the ointment she had anointed Jesus's feet with. There is grief. There is mourning. The theologian Doug Hall once wrote, "That we, God's people, God's church, suffer, and have marks of the suffering, is a mark of authenticity."

(Close up of Jesus)

And in the center is Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God dying. He has the same skin lesions and wounds as the patients who would have gazed upon him. This is no triumphal cross with someone saying accept this message and your problems will all be over. This is Jesus who walks along side of us in the midst of our own version of a plague. He is alongside of us, weeping with us, even in the darkest of nights. Here is Jesus who sees our world of cultural turbulence, the shifting of global landscapes and even church landscapes.



I have vague memories of sitting next to others in the stained-glass sunshine of this sanctuary. But Jesus reminds us and those who sat in that hospital chapel, that the church is not a hiding place but a place of hope. We see the pain; we see and know the sorrows surrounding us. The story isn't over. God is moving in and among us. God is with us, waiting with strong arms to catch us when all our nets break. God is waiting with loving arms to cradle us when all our dying is done too. The story of God's redeeming love is not over.

And so, we comfort those who need comfort. We forgive and extend mercy. We weep with those who weep. And even in the darkest of nights, we all have hope. "Surely, he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed."

➤ *Go to dark Gethsemane*

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† Offering and Prayer

We give thanks for the church and the opportunity we have to support it through our offerings.

Loving God, your gifts to us are beyond measure. Today we present what we can as a joyous offering of thanks. Accept these gifts from our hearts. Keep us, our congregations and your church faithful in worship, humble in service, gracious in spirit, grounded in truth and persistent in proclaiming the good news of the gospel. we pray in the name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen

† Prayer

Lord Jesus, we gather at the foot of the cross, longing to understand. Open us to the cross' mystery and saving power.

We see in your cross the agony of humankind and the cruel injustice of human systems. We are tempted to despair at humanity's inhumanity.

We know that, the way the world works, we still perpetrate cruelty, sometimes deliberately, more often by simply not knowing what we do.

We are tempted to cynicism, without hope for ourselves or the world. Yet we call this day good, for the cross, that lays bare the sin of the world, also reveals your love. Though unbelievable, we would believe.

In your cross, all the powers of sin and death are defeated. In your cross is our hope, our joy, our reason for being. So we call this day good. At the foot of the cross we are "lost in wonder, love, and praise." Amen

➤ *This, this, is Christ the King*

Silent Reflection