



seeking:
honest questions
for deeper faith

good friday

A SERVICE OF SILENCE & SORROW

Liturgy by Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow

We invite you to implement this service as-is, or adapt it for your context. Either way, please attribute credit as follows: Liturgy by Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

introduction

about the service

No one enjoys experiencing sorrow, lament, or grief, yet these are natural parts of the rhythms of life. These moments make us feel vulnerable and exposed so we avoid them, and in doing so, we deny ourselves an important opportunity to meet God in different ways. To be clear, we should not seek out sorrow, lament, or grief, nor should we chase these experiences in order to pass some kind of "test" from God. God does not play games with creation. God does not think so little of our hearts and minds to put us through experiences that cause us harm; rather, in the midst of so much pain in the world, God makes Godself known in the midst of it all.

Our Good Friday service rests in the belief that in places of sorrow, lament, and grief we meet God differently. In our culture of conflict avoidance, we too often rush through these moments, touching down as lightly as possible as we reach out for the new life offered on Easter Sunday. In doing so, we do not give ourselves a chance to meet the God who sits with us in our sorrow. With this in mind, central to this service is creating a space where people can gather around the cross with as much vulnerability as possible in silence and in sorrow.

about the liturgy outline

- This service relies heavily on facilitating silence; embrace it! We also encourage you to lead the service without any printed bulletins.
- *Italicized lines* are notes for worship leaders.
- Regular text is to be spoken by worship leaders.

wait, what, no bulletin?!

- Bulletins are often used as a comfort tool. Generally speaking, this is a good idea, but for this particular service, the jarring nature of not having something to hold will help to create a space that invites openness and vulnerability.
- This liturgy will require worship leadership to guide people through the service as if everyone is there for the first time, so this may also be an exercise in vulnerability for worship leadership.
- We will use one recognizable hymn, "Were You There."¹ While it would be great to have a cantor who can lead, someone may simply have to sing boldly.

notes about the space

- The space should clearly communicate that we are gathered around a central point. This may mean moving the service to a space where you can worship in the round. Holding the service outdoors could be powerful.
- At the center of your space, place a cross and/or pieces of wood for worshipers to hammer nails into. You will also want to include lots of lit candles near the cross. At the end of the service, worshipers will be invited to express their sorrow in three possible ways: by dropping a stone (*or nail*) on the cross, by hammering a nail into the wood, or by extinguishing a candle. Discern if you will provide some or all of these options.
- For worshipers unable to move forward to the cross, bring a nail or stone to them so they can hold the item as they pray from their seat.
- Invite people to sit, kneel, or recline around this space so our bodies can visually and physically surround the center. You may wish to provide a variety of chairs and floor cushions.
- At the beginning of the service, light the space as brightly as possible. With each movement, you will want to progressively dim the lights during the moments for silence. In the script, there are seven cues to dim the lights, so plan accordingly based on the lighting in your space. At the end of the liturgy, make the space as dark as is safely possible, as worshipers will depart in silence and darkness.
- If you do not have the capacity to progressively dim the lighting in your space, you could alternatively flip the lights off during the moments for silence and bring them back up during each singing of "Were You There?" If you choose this option, bring the lights back up to a lesser brightness so it is not too jarring.
- For hybrid/online worship: Have worshipers draw or hold a cross near them to focus on during the times of silence.

supplies needed

- A large wooden cross, and/or pieces of wood laid out in the center of the worshiping area.
- Cushions, chairs, etc. surrounding the cross.
- Smooth rocks or long nails that will make a sound when dropped on the cross.
- Hammers.
- Lit candles placed around the cross.
- A singing bowl, hand chime, or another instrument to mark when silence begins.
- A timer or clock to note when three minutes have passed during the times for silence. You may want to use a silent timer like a sand timer, as you will want to avoid a timer with a loud alarm.

¹ African-American spiritual. Tune: WERE YOU THERE. Public domain.
https://hymnary.org/text/were_you_there_when_they_crucified_my_lo

worship leadership

- If you wish to include multiple liturgists in the service, you could include as many as three scripture readers. Clergy could take turns leading from the worship script.
- Depending on the size of your congregation, you may wish to appoint ushers to help pass materials around at the end of the service, especially to those who may be unable to come forward to the cross.
- If you are able to progressively dim the lighting in your space, you will want to appoint someone to be in charge of this, following the cues in the worship script.
- You may wish to have a musician or a soloist lead the singing. You could invite a pianist or instrumentalist to play music softly in the background at the beginning and at the end of the service.

order of worship

gather

As people enter, you might have music playing in the background. Have baskets filled with stones or nails clearly placed around the space, and have all candles lit.

welcome

Welcome to our service of silence and sorrow on this Good Friday. We are grateful that you have taken the time to gather together. There is no bulletin today, as we will guide you through the service. In our liturgy, we will be sharing in times of silence in three minute intervals to symbolize the three hours Jesus suffered on the cross before his death.

During our times of silence, do not worry about controlling your thoughts or blocking out the sounds around us. In a world filled with so much noise, silence can be uncomfortable and startling, but it can also be healing and revelatory. If the time feels long, hear that as a prompting from God to open yourself even more. Tonight, in this silence we meet God in new ways. In this space,² you are invited to hold your body and soul in whatever ways you are most comfortable. Listen to your breath, inhale and exhale, and be open to how the Spirit may move your soul.

We will be prompted into silence with the ringing of a chime and invited back by singing the first verse of, "Were You There":³

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

² Alternatively, "At home..."

³ At this point, you might practice singing the first verse together, or have a soloist sing it, as a reminder of the words and melody.