

Prayer Vigil Guide



Maundy Thursday and Good Friday
Desert Foothills
United Methodist Church

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for participating in our 28-hour Holy Thursday and Good Friday prayer vigil. You've signed up to pray for half an hour (or more), and this guide is meant to help you know what to do with that time!

First, you may wonder **WHERE** to pray. You can pray anywhere! But you might give some forethought to this question so you can help yourself be in a place where there are few distractions during your prayer time. If you have a normal place to pray, then you are set. You are also welcome to come to the church to pray up until midnight on Thursday and then again from 6 a.m. to midnight on Friday. There will be a prayer station set up in the sanctuary with a chair and the kneeler, a candle and a cross. You might also think of a place where you feel very connected to God, but can be apart from distractions or the temptation to sleep, a place where you can be comfortable and engaged at the same time.

Next think about your body and what to do with it while you pray. Sometimes the **POSITION** in which we pray makes a lot of difference. I like to pray much of the time sitting on a low stool so that I can sit up straight with my legs crossed in front of me with my hands open on my knees. You might have a rocking chair that works for you or a place to lay down (but stay awake) or a place to walk and pray. I encourage you to think about this for just a minute so that it doesn't become a distraction to you when you pray. Think ahead about what will be comfortable, but engaging for the half hour you are in prayer.

Now, particularly if you are newer at praying for an extended time, you can start thinking about **HOW TO PRAY**. This booklet is full of suggestions and guidance for you. There are a few suggestions of different prayer styles you might try out. There are some "prayer classics" which come to us through the traditions of the church which you might make yours. There are some meditations which you can read and let guide your reflections. There are prayers of intercession. And there are prayers meant particularly for Lenten reflection.

We each have particular styles of prayer that are more meaningful to us. This booklet is meant to speak to several different styles. So do not feel as though you need to get through this whole book. Accept the guidance of what draws you. Don't worry about the parts that don't. Don't feel limited by this book (or the time frame) either. If you have your own method, then use that. If you want to pray longer than half an hour or add in additional time through the weekend, please do. If half an hour of prayer is a stretch for you, good for you for taking the step to grow into

that. Don't be afraid! Think of it as hanging out with God for half an hour. You don't have to come up with words for that whole time, or even any of that time. Listen. Breathe. Take time just to be in God's presence.

The **GOAL** of this prayer vigil time is to collectively enter into prayer during this holiest time of year. As a church family we are joining together from wherever we are, handing off the vigil from one person to the next. It's a way of joining together even when we are apart. It's a way of trusting that we are partnering together, taking turns to cover our church, our community, our world with prayer as we dwell in the darkness of Good Friday. It's an opportunity to be FUELED by a closeness to God and create a culture in which prayer is woven into the fabric of our daily live and our relationships with each other.

If you have questions, concerns, ideas, stories to share, feel free to contact me: jenny@desertfoothills.org or 602-570-2470.

Grace and peace as you pray,
Pastor Jenny

PRAYERS OF PEACE AND SURRENDER

O God of peace, You have taught us that in returning and rest, we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength. By the might of your spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, forever and ever, Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you. And then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people. Through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee;
let me be full, let me be empty;
let me have all things, let me have nothing;
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine.
So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.
(United Methodist Hymnal, pg. 607)

Celtic prayer:

I weave a silence onto my lips
I weave a silence into my mind
I weave a silence within my heart
I close my ears to distractions
I close my eyes to attractions
I close my heart to temptation.
Calm me, O God, as you stilled the storm,
Still me, O God, keep me from harm.
Let all tumult within me cease;
Enfold me, O God, in your peace.

Lord's Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Heavenly Mother,
holy and blessed is your true name.
We pray for your reign of peace to come.
We pray that your good will be done.
Let heaven and earth become one.
Give us this day the bread we need.
Give it to those who have none.
Let forgiveness flow like a river between us,
from each one to each one to each one.
Lead us to holy innocence beyond the evil of our days.
Come swiftly Mother, Father come,
for yours is the power, and the mercy, and the glory.
Forever your name is all in one. Amen.

SUGGESTED INTERCESSORY PRAYERS

Pray for:

The programs and missions of Desert Foothills UMC

Desert Southwest Conference

Our Bishop (Minerva Carcaño), our District Superintendent (Sharon Ragland), the rest of the cabinet and conference staff, our sister churches throughout Arizona and southern Nevada.

Pastor Jenny as she prepares for renewal leave

The pastors who will be filling the pulpit while she is gone
Rev. Tom Kiracofe, Rev. Geoff Ebright, Rev. Lynn Bartlow

The laity of the church who will be taking on extra duties during
Jenny's leave

Our world leaders

An end to armed conflict around the world

The community of Ahwatukee-Foothills

DFUMC youth and children

Those who are hungry every day

Those who are grieving

Those who suffer from injury or disability

Those who suffer from life-threatening illness

Those who suffer from mental illness

Those in financial hardship

The unemployed

The oppressed and abused of this world

The healing of our environment, God's creation

Immigration issues

Our enemies

The most vulnerable among us – our children

PRAYER STYLES

Breath prayer:

Choose a phrase which most closely reflects your address for God, such as "loving Father", "heavenly Savior", "divine wisdom", etc. Then choose a short phrase which is your petition to God at this time – fill me, guide me, give me peace, etc. Then close your eyes and focus on your breath. Breathe slowly and deeply. On your inhale, repeat your name for God in your mind, and on the exhale, repeat your petition. If your thoughts wander, simply release them and return to your breath prayer. Try this for about five minutes.

Jesus prayer:

This prayer has been used from the time of the early church and is often cited as the means by which we might "pray without ceasing." It is a simple repetition of "**Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.**" There are many versions, and if you know another version, feel free to use it. This prayer can be used throughout the day and often instills a sense of peace, helping one who prays it stay centered in God.

Body prayer:

Try various prayer postures if you feel comfortable doing so. This might include kneeling, bowing, lying face down on the floor, raising your arms in a posture of praise, holding your palms face up on your lap as a symbol of receptivity to God, etc. The Catholic tradition of crossing themselves is another kind of body prayer. If you like, try this while reciting the Great Commandment "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength."

HOLY WEEK MEDITATION

Oh, how we love Palm Sunday – the triumphal entry, the waving palms, the cloaks lining the road as our Savior made his way into the city, the cries of “Hosanna! Save us!” The Hebrew people were crying out to be saved from the oppressive Roman rule, from a life of hardship and crushing taxes. They were hoping that Jesus was the Messiah they had been taught was coming, a powerful leader who would overthrow the despised government and bring a new reign of peace, prosperity and freedom. This was a here-and-now kind of expectation, but Jesus had a larger goal in mind. The Jews’ short-sighted desires were not Jesus’ idea for the kingdom of God.

I confess that I, too, am sometimes short-sighted, pleading for God’s saving grace from whatever immediate difficulty I face, whatever painful event is making my life less than ideal today. Yet God always hold the longer view, the future prospective. God is looking for a relationship with us that is not defined by good times or bail-outs from whatever difficulty in which we find ourselves.

Hanmer Parsons Grant once said, “We must free ourselves of the hope that the sea will ever rest. We must learn to sail in high winds.” This is the essence of life, and it is a life that strengthens us, purifies us and brings about growth and wisdom. Knowing this to be true, we must let go of our selfish prayers and learn to take God’s larger perspective. The Israelites were not really interested in the kind of salvation Jesus offered – a salvation that was available to all people everywhere and for all time. They just wanted to be free of their immediate misery. And they were certainly accustomed to expecting it to be accomplished via the grand gesture. God’s chosen people had enjoyed many miracles – the parting of the Red Sea, the tumbling Jericho wall, the stunning defeat of Goliath – so this Jesus who rode on a lowly donkey and got himself crucified by the establishment was a real come-down. They closed their eyes to the glory of something more, a parallel universe of love and grace that can be accessed at any moment, a salvation for all that doesn’t have to be earned through adherence to a labyrinthine set of rules and sacrifices. But it does require the one thing that may be hardest of all for the human animal – removing Self from the center of our heart and mind and soul and putting God there instead. We must loosen our grasp on ego-driven agendas and momentary relief and enter into a relationship of profound trust with our Creator and Friend. Perhaps only then will we learn to sail in high winds and feel the exhilaration of the waves without fear, for it is God at the helm.

-Sue Magrath

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

As Jesus watched Judas leave the upper room, a cold, hard ball of dread formed in his chest. "It has begun," he thought and suppressed the shudder that threatened to unravel him. Then he turned back to the disciples, for there were many things yet to be said. As they broke bread with him and drank from the cup, he changed the significance of this simple act forever with his words of love and promise. Then they sang together, one final song of praise, though only Jesus knew this to be true. His grief for the loss of these, his closest friends, men who had stayed by his side through three years of controversial ministry, threatened to overwhelm him. He desperately needed to withdraw to the garden for prayer. And so they went.

"Watch and pray," he said to the disciples, as he walked a short distance from them. Even though his prayer was a private thing, he wanted them near him for companionship and protection. The loneliness and vulnerability Jesus felt was overpowering. No one could possibly understand the weight of what was about to happen, the horror of the death he had to face. It was too much, just too much. The sweat of his anguish fell like rain from his brow. "Father, take this burden from me. Don't make me do this. I'm scared. Please, Father. But I know it's necessary. I know how much you love them, how much I love them. If this is your will, I surrender to it. Be with me."

Returning to his friends, he saw them sprawled on the ground, limbs loose in sleep, the peace of their ignorance allowing them to feel no fear. How could they have abandoned him in his time of deepest need, when he yearned for their presence, their comfort? His anger rose, and he woke them. "Could you not stay awake for even a few minutes as I asked? Please keep watch with me and pray." He left them again, and again they slept as he repeated his agonizing prayer of deliverance, his loving prayer of surrender. And somewhere in the dark, lonely silence, Christ found the strength to suffer the cross, to face and defeat death. But where will we be when that happens, asleep as the disciples were? Or will we watch and pray?

-Sue Magrath

LENTEN PRAYERS

Psalm 31

In You, Beloved, I would make my home;
Though I be humiliated with guilt,
 Your mercy and forgiveness will deliver me!
Hear me and hasten to my assistance!
For You are my strength and have the power
 to raise me up!

Yes, You are strength and truth to me;
 lead me and guide me
 that I may grow;
Loosen me from the net which entangles me,
 for your Heart is my home.
Into your hands I commend my soul;
 You have redeemed me, O Love, Faithful One.

You turn from those who trust in false idols;
 I put my trust in You, O Beloved.
I rejoice and am glad for your steadfast Love,
 for You have seen my guilt,
 You have noted my wrongdoings,
And have not left me alone with my fears;
 Rather, You have set my feet on
 the path of love.

Be gracious to me, Beloved, for I am in distress;
 my eyes are dim from weeping,
 my soul is deep with grief.
For my life is worn away with sorrow,
 and my years with sighing;
My body has weakened and my bones
 waste away with misery . . .

Still, I trust in You, O Love,
 I repeat, "You are my Life."
My life is in your hands;
 deliver me from the fears which separate me!
Let your face shine on me;
 save me in your steadfast love!
. . . So, be strong, and let your heart take courage,
 all you, who would know Love!

Nan Merrill. *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 1996), 53-55.

The Farewell Tear

a feast of friendship
a story of betrayal
a memory of gifts given

you look with such intense love
on each one gathered there,
mist covers your deep brown eyes
as you hold each one in your gaze,
you close your eyes and I see
the farewell tear of friendship
as it follows the curve of your cheek.

you take the bread,
bless it gently, profoundly,
with old words and new.
(do you mean to say it is yourself?)

and then the wine,
again with words old and new.
(do you mean to say this, too,
is now yourself?)

you look again at each one there
and give the eternal gift:
"remember me and do the same."

like those around the table then,
so with us who gather now,
if we knew how close our hearts
are held inside of yours,
we would always be amazed
that you meant this for us, too.

how shall we ever be brave enough
to do what you have done,
when grief engulfs our every breath
and each memorial word
is laden with our loss?

Joyce Rupp. *out of the ordinary: prayers, poems, and reflections for every season* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2000), 123.

Carrying the Cross

Response: Jesus, grant us strength to carry our cross.

- On those days when life seems too demanding with all its cares, burdens, and concerns . . .
- When we experience great loneliness deep inside and the pain of separation fills our spirits . . .
- When we feel the pain of our world and unite in compassion with the Earth's suffering people . . .
- When we struggle with decision-making and the time comes to make good choices about our lives . . .
- When we are with others in their physical pain or when we vigil with one who has a terminal illness . . .
- When we are asked to go the extra mile, to be generous with our time and our presence . . .
- When we feel weary and worn out, when it seems like all of our energy has been drained away . . .
- When we are challenged to risk our security and to accept new growth in our relationship with you . . .
- When we experience the effects of aging or extended illness on our bodies or our minds . . .
- When we feel discouraged, desolate, and depressed and want to withdraw from others . . .
- When worries and concerns choke our peacefulness and leave us with anxiety and fear . . .
- When we harbor old wounds and are called to offer or to receive forgiveness . . .

Crucified Jesus, help us to take up our cross day by day. Through these crosses we can grow closer to you. Help us to lean on you and to learn from you. May we not give in to self-pity or self-doubt. Rather, let us trust in your presence which strengthens us. Encourage us on our tomb-like days. Remind us of your resurrection. Help us to keep our vision focused on life and growth. Amen.

-Joyce Rupp, op. cit., 117.