

Introduction and Instructions

Welcome to this unique Good Friday worship and prayer experience. We are glad you have chosen to join us. Since this is a come and go experience, please sign in so we know how many people are here. Then take this sheet, read the instructions below, and then proceed to the church sanctuary for your journey through the prayer stations.

There's no denying it. Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Christian story. Our faith was founded by and grounded on the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. It raises a central question for us: Who is this Jesus, really? In Jesus' day there were all kinds of ideas about who he was. Some said he was John the Baptist. Others said he was Elijah. Still others one of the prophets (Mark 8:28). After hearing what everyone else thought, he asked his disciples a deeply personal question: But what about you? Who do you say that I am? (Mark 8:29). Every one of us is called to wrestle with that question and to answer it for ourselves. It's not something that can be left to chance. It's not something others can decide for us. It's not something we can inherit simply because we were born into a Christian home. What about you? Who do you say Jesus is?

It's for that reason we have developed a series of reflective prayer stations to help you meditate more deeply on who this Jesus really is and why he came. Again and again, Jesus answered that question, most clearly in the so called I AM statements in the Gospel of John. On 7 different occasions, Jesus answered that question with vivid images and metaphors beginning with the words I AM that we might come to know who he really is and why he really came.

Each prayer station will have an image, a scripture reading, a reflection, and a hands-on action for private meditation and prayer. The goal is to meet with Jesus today. Spend as much time as you want at each station as you want and when you are finished move on to the next station. While you may do them in any order, you will find benefit in doing them in the following order.

Prayer Station 1: The Great I AM

Prayer Station 2: I am the Bread of Life

Prayer Station 3: I am the Light of the World

Prayer Station 4: I am the Gate and the Good Shepherd

Prayer Station 5: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

Prayer Station 6: I am the Vine; You are the Branches.

Prayer Station 7: I am the Resurrection and the Life

When you are finished, please leave in silence so as not to disrupt others who are praying.

Prayer Station 1: The Great I Am

Image: Fire, Rocks

Scripture Reading 1: Exodus 3:1-14

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So, Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up. When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So, I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “**I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’**”

Scripture Reading 2: John 8:53-59

“Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?” Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.” “You are not yet fifty years old,” the Jews said to him, “and you have seen Abraham!” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “**before Abraham was born, I AM!**” At this they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself slipping away from the temple grounds.”

Reflection 1: The Great I AM

Who are you? Who do you think you are? Several times in John 8, the Jews ask some version of that question. On several occasions in the Gospel of John, Jesus answers that question with self-revealing statements that begin with the words I AM. Those words are meant to remind us of God's words to Moses at the burning bush. When Moses says that he does not know God's name. God tells him "I AM THAT I AM." Tell the people of Israel that I AM has sent me unto you. Thousands of years later, Jesus utters those same words. "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I AM," and immediately, the Jews pick up stones to stone him to death. The Old Testament said the penalty for blasphemy was stoning. It's an indication that they understand what he is claiming; Jesus is identifying himself with God. He is the great I AM.

What about you? How do you respond when the divine impresses itself upon you? How do you respond when the divine breaks into your life? Who do you say this Jesus is? Are you willing to embrace his claim upon you or will you join with the Jews in denying his claim upon your life?

Spend some time in prayer and confession. Where in your life have you denied this Jesus? Where have you denied his divine claim on your life through your words or your actions? Where in your life are you still going your own way and doing your own thing? Where do you need to be still and know that he is God? Where do you need to submit to his call upon your life tonight? Where do you need to simply acknowledge that he is God and that you are not?

Action: Take a rock and write your sins down on it. Then ask Jesus to forgive you tonight.

Prayer Station 2: The Bread of Life

Image: Loaf of Bread, Communion Elements

Scripture: John 6:24-35, 49-58

Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him. "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the work God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." So, they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." Then Jesus declared, "**I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.** ... Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."

Scripture Reading 2: John 4:10-14

Jesus said: "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and well is deep. Where can you get this living water.? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds." Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Reflection 2: The Bread of Life

Let me set the scene for you. In John 6:1-15, Jesus has just fed the 5000, but less than 24 hours later, the people are already wanting him to do it for them all over again. They come to Jesus seeking bread—that he would open up the heavens and give them manna from heaven to eat. What they received yesterday is no longer good enough. They want more. They want Jesus to be their meal ticket. They want Jesus to rain down bread from heaven. They are hungry again.

But today, Jesus offers them a different kind of bread. Rather than giving them mere physical bread as he did before, this time he offers them spiritual food. Bread is no longer a loaf sitting on the table; it's a person. "I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty again." Think about that image for a minute. Bread was the most common of all foods. It was the basic staple that was found at every table. Bread was in many ways the source of life and sustenance. But the bread that Jesus offers us is not a bread that is going to fade or spoil after a couple of hours. It's not something that's going to leave us coming back over and over and over again for more. It's permanent and lasting. Only Jesus can offer true satisfaction for the soul. Just as the body cannot live without food, we cannot live without Jesus. Only Jesus can meet the deepest needs of the human soul.

It raises the question: What are you really chasing after? What are you really hungry for? What wells are you coming back to over and over again to satisfy the thirst of your soul, but yet, you still end up feeling just as empty, dry, hungry, and thirsty as you were before? I wonder: Will you come to Jesus today? Will you find your whole life and existence in him and him alone?

Spend some time in prayer and confession. Acknowledge the other things you are chasing after. Admit your sins. Acknowledge your hunger and thirst and then throw yourself fully on his grace.

Action: Holy Communion

On the night in which our Lord Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, lifted it to heaven, blessed it, and said, THIS IS MY BODY, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, lifted it to heaven, blessed it and said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins. Do this in remembrance of me. We come to this table, because in him we have life. In him we are forgiven. In him we are made new. In him we have true and lasting satisfaction of the soul. True life is in him alone.

Take and eat of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Allow his life to fill you, to restore your soul.

Prayer Station 3: The Light of the World

Image: Candles

Scripture Reading 1: John 8:12

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

Scripture Reading 2: John 9:1-11

As Jesus went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, **I am the light of the world.**” Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told them, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means Sent). So, the man went and washed, and came home seeing.” His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.” How then were your eyes opened. He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So, I went and washed and then I could see.”

Scripture Reading 3: Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on a stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before people, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Reflection 3: The Light of the World

Two times Jesus refers to himself as the light of the world in John

The first is in John 8:12. The context is the Feast of the Tabernacles (John 7:2), an annual festival that was held to commemorate the wandering of the people in the wilderness. One of the most significant events of that festival was the lighting of four torches in the temple to commemorate God's guidance of the people in the wilderness as a pillar of fire. Each day as the people journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land, God led the way, step by step by step. Jesus says he is the light of the world, because he is seeking to identify himself with the pillar of fire in the wilderness. He is the one who guides us through the wilderness of human life.

The second image is found in John 9. There Jesus heals a blind man. The man begins his story in utter darkness. That is, he is unable to see. But as he is touched by the one who is light (that is, Jesus), his life is transformed. He is healed and now he is able to see and becomes himself a witness to that light. As light, Jesus not only provides guidance, he also brings transformation.

It raises a question: Where do you need God to provide guidance in your life today? Where do you need his light to shine into the darkness of your world? Where have you been wandering around hopelessly lost in the wilderness? Where do you need transformation in your life now?

Action: Take a candle and light it.

As you watch the flame, spend some time taking your concerns to God in prayer. Ask God to speak into each situation with his guidance and light. Take time to stop and listen for his voice.

And then remember that Jesus also said: YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, sent, like the blind man to point others to the one who is the light in this world. Light always spreads. We are agents of his transforming work in the world. Who is there in your life that God might be calling you to point to Jesus today? Who might you invite to Easter worship this coming Sunday?

Prayer Station 4: The Gate and the Good Shepherd

Image: Door and Sheep

Scripture Reading 1: John 10:1-18

I tell you the truth the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore, Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, **I am the gate for the sheep**. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. **I am the gate;** whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. **I am the good shepherd**. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So, when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **I am the good shepherd;** I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

Scripture Reading 2: Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely, goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Reflection 4: The Gate and the Good Shepherd

In this passage, Jesus uses two images. He identifies himself both as a gate and a shepherd for the sheep. To understand these images, we have to start with the image of a sheep. Sheep require constant and meticulous attention. They need a shepherd to guide them, lead them, care for them and protect them. They need someone to feed them and watch over them. Without the guidance and leadership of the shepherd sheep would very easily wonder off to their own destruction. Without the guidance and leadership of the shepherd the sheep would be vulnerable to attack by predators or thieves. Sheep rely on the shepherd for everything.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he is the one who watches over our life. He leads us and guides us to where he wants us to be. He loves and cares for us. He provides protection from all evil. He does this in two ways. During the day, the shepherd took the danger head on. When a wild animal such as a bear, a lion, or a wolf came to attack, the shepherd put himself between the sheep and the source of danger in order to protect the flock. At night, the shepherd served as the gate. Unlike most modern sheep pens, pens in the ancient world, especially those in the country, didn't always have a gate there, so the shepherd literally was the gate. At night, they would lay down at the entrance to the fold so that any sheep that tried to escape or any wild animal that tried to get in had to go through him first and so the sheep felt safe and secure.

Implicit to this whole relationship was one thing: Trust. The sheep had to trust the shepherd. They had to trust they were watching out for them. They had to trust they were guiding them to the right place. They had to trust they were protecting them and that they had their back.

The problem is: We are a little less trusting than sheep. We don't always believe Jesus has our best interest at heart and so we often do things our own way to our own destruction.

It raises a question: How much do you trust Jesus? Do you trust him enough to let him guide you and lead you wherever he wants? Do you trust him enough to follow him even if it might mean going somewhere you don't want to go or to step out and do something you don't want to do? Do you really believe he has your best interest at heart? Do you trust him enough to follow his voice? Do you even know his voice?

Spend some time in prayer. Ask Jesus to show you where you need to trust him more. Offer yourself to him. Think through the various areas of your life. Name them out loud one by one. Action: Write them down on the sheet of paper that you see. Surrender. Let go. Journal if it helps. Trust yourself into the hands of the shepherd. Then sit in the silence and rest in his presence. Listen for his voice. The sheep know the voice of their shepherd and follow.

Where is he calling you to go? How is he calling you to respond? What is he calling you to do? What is he calling you to let go of? How is he asking you to trust him tonight?

Prayer Station 5: The Way, the Truth, and the Life

Images: Directions, Signs, Arrows

Scripture Reading: John 14:1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** If you really knew me you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

Reflection 5: The Way, the Truth, and the Life

In the classic book, *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice comes to a fork in the road. Panic sets in as she stands frozen by indecision. She doesn't know which way she should go. She lifts her eyes to heaven, seeking a little guidance, only to see the Cheshire Cat: "Which way should I go?" Alice says. "That depends on your destination," the cat says. "Where are you going?" To which Alice replies: "I don't know!" "Then," replies the cat, "it doesn't really matter does it."

But the fact is it does matter. The fact is every choice we make in life determines the course that our life will take. When Jesus says that he is the way, the truth, and the life, he is saying that he sets the trajectory for life. That he is the one we base our life upon, because he is the one who shows us the way to God; no one comes to the Father except through him. To make Jesus the way, the truth, and the life is to make him the absolute reference of our entire way of life. The guidepost for determining our priorities, our decisions, and the choices we make in life. He calls us to wrestle with one of life's fundamental questions: What are you going to base your life upon? What's going to be the guiding factor and determining force for direction in life?

I wonder: What are you basing your life on right now? What's calling the shots? What's the guiding force that determines your priorities and decisions in life? Is it Jesus Christ or is it something else? Because only Jesus can lead us to the Father. He is the way, the truth, the life.

Spend some time in prayer. Reflect on your life. What is most important to you? What is guiding your life? Action: Look at the road signs. Which road sign do you think best describes where you are at right now? Why? Bring it to God. Spend time in silence. Listen for his voice. Which way is Jesus calling you to go? What is he calling you to do? How is he leading you?

Prayer Station 6: The Vine and the Branches

Image: Grapes, Vine, Fruit

Scripture Reading: John 15:1-11

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more faithful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. **I am the vine; you are the branches.** If a person remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Reflection 6: The Vine and the Branches

In this passage, Jesus identifies himself with a grapevine. The vine is the most critical part of the entire plant. The vine is the central delivery system for all the branches on the plant. It provides water, food, nutrients, nourishments, and sustenance for the branches to grow and thrive. The vine feeds the branch. The branch will always produce what the life coursing through the vine empowers it to provide. The quality of the fruit is directly tied to the type of vine that it is on. Look at the fruit in your life and you can identify the type of vine you are currently connected to.

It raises a question: Are we actually abiding in Christ? Are we staying connected to him? Are we spending time in the word? Are we meeting with him in prayer? Are there other things that are draining our spiritual energy? Are we tapping into other false vines for life and sustenance?

Return to prayer. Reflect on your life. Where are you tapping into other things right now? Where are you finding your life outside of him? Take time in confession and repentance. What do you need to cut out of your life? What things do you need to start to plug back into Jesus?

Action: Take several deep breaths. Feel your breath. Breathe out and let go. Breathe in and receive new life in him. Disconnect from other things. Reconnect with him tonight.

Prayer Station 7: The Resurrection and the Life

Image: Cross, Hammer, Nails, Crown of Thorns

Scripture Reading: John 11:1-44

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So, the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea." "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light." After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So, then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples. "Let us also go, that we may die with him." On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.** Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and he is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has

been there four days.” Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So, they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Reflection 7: The Resurrection and the Life

In this story, Jesus stands at the entrance to a tomb. The tomb of a dead man by the name of Lazarus. By the time that Jesus arrived on the scene, Lazarus had already been dead for four days. There was a Jewish tradition that said the spirit hovered over the body, hoping to find a way back until the fourth day, but on the fourth day, the spirit left the body. In other words, to say that Lazarus has been dead for four days means that he is really dead. All hope is gone. There is no possibility for revival. He is past the point of return. He is undeniably dead. Yet, even as Jesus stares in the face of death he has the audacity to speak of resurrection and new life. I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live even though he dies. Mary and Martha had the capacity to believe that Jesus could work miracles when Lazarus was sick and dying, but did they have the capacity to believe that Jesus had power over death itself?

What about you? How do you respond when you stare impossible situations in the face? Maybe you can sympathize with their pain. Maybe you can resonate with their question: Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. It’s the kind of question we tend to ask when it doesn’t look like Jesus is anywhere to be found. Lord, if you had been here, my marriage wouldn’t have fallen apart. Lord, if you had been here, I wouldn’t have lost my job. If you had been here, my child would not have died. My health would not have failed. Things would have turned out different. Many times, life seems like a broken record of disappointment. God doesn’t always show up when or how we want him to. Many times, like Mary and Marth we are left starting at the graves of dead hopes and dreams because God didn’t work as we wanted.

But the truth is: There is no resurrection hope without death. To get to the resurrection of Easter morning, we first have to go through the death and suffering of the cross. Today is Good Friday. It is the day in the life of the church that we remember the death of Jesus Christ.

Take some time to reflect on the cross of Christ. Reflect on the pain and suffering of the cross. Action: Take the hammer and pound a few nails into the cross. Reflect on the image of death. Sit in the silence. Take time to think about the things or the people in your life that have died. Where are you staring at death this evening? Where does it look hopeless? Where does it look like there is no way forward? Take those things to God in prayer. And then remember: The dawn is coming. It’s not over. In 3 days, Jesus will get up out of that grave. Resurrection is not an event. It is a person. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He has power over life and death. There is always hope. Leave in silence in anticipation and hope of the resurrection to come.

Set Up Needs

Station 1: Fire, Small Rocks, Markers

Station 2: Loaf of Bread, Communion (crackers and individual cups), Cup

Station 3: 1 Large central candle lit; several small tea candles to be lit; a couple Christmas candles to transfer the light.

Station 4: Sheep, paper and pens

Station 5: Pictures of Road Signs, Direction Signs, Arrows

Station 6: Grapes, Pictures of Vine

Station 7: Large cross, a couple hammers, nails, crown of thorns