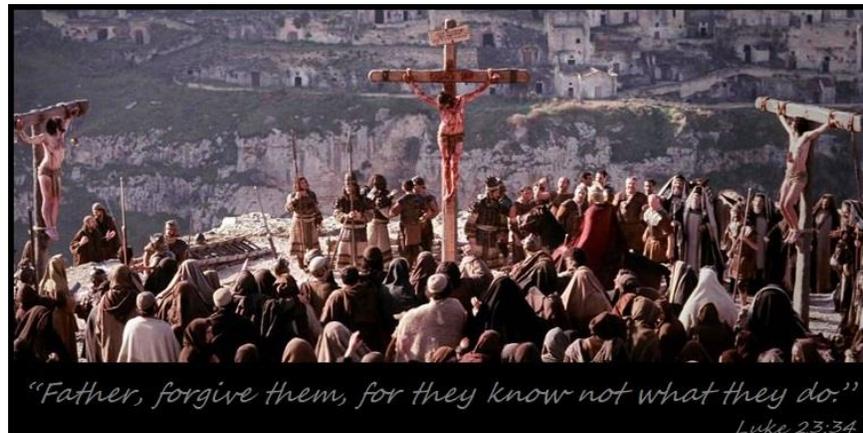


The First Baptist Church of Fitchburg
1400 John Fitch Highway Fitchburg, MA 01420
April 10th, 2020, Good Friday Service



Welcome: Good afternoon on this Good Friday. Let us prepare our hearts and minds as we seek to explore the journey of Jesus Christ, on that solemn day when He gave up His own life, for the sake of ours; a day we commemorate as “Good”, because it was Holy, and done for the sake of our eternal salvation.

Opening Prayer: As we come to worship and remember, let us bring to God our worries, our fears, our complaints, animosities, sins, bad manners, our unforgiveness and our hurts, and lay them at the foot of the cross, where Christ will take away our burdens, lift us up before the Father and send us on our way rejoicing, in Jesus’ name.

Commencement: This is a variation on the traditional *Stations of the Cross*, also called *Way of the Cross*, a series of 14 pictures that portrayed the events in the Passion of Christ, from his condemnation to his entombment. The first, second, and third fall, as well as Jesus meeting His mother and Veronica on the way to Golgotha are not to be found in the texts of the canonical Bible, yet they have been celebrated as part of the events of Jesus’ last day from the time of the 1st century.

Let us reflect on the suffering of our Lord, Jesus on that long ago day that changed the world, through the words spoken of Him by the prophets, hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth.

1. Christ was condemned to death;

Over one thousand years before Jesus took the chastisement we deserved upon Himself for our sake, the Psalmist, King David prophesized His distress:

“Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak. Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors and an object of dread to my closest friends—those who see me on the street flee from me. I am forgotten as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery. For I hear many whispering, “Terror on every side!” They conspire against me and plot to take my life. But I trust in you, LORD; I say, ‘You are my God.’” (Psalm 31:9-14).

2. The cross was laid upon Him;

Each of us have sinned. Often our first sinful acts are committed before we have an understanding of what sin is, yet this one Man lived a sinless life, and having made Himself a perfect sacrifice without blemish (*Exodus 12:5, 1 Peter 1:19*), embodied the sacrificial Lamb of God, who would take away the sins of the world (*John 1:29*).

“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:3-5).

3. His first fall;

The anger and detestation towards Jesus was made apparent through the crowd that would mock, slander and scorn Him as He passed through the streets of Jerusalem on the way to the hill of Golgotha. Sounds of curses and insults heaped upon Christ can still be heard today.

“and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn” (Zechariah 12:10).

4. He met His Blessed Mother;

Prayer of Confession: We are painfully aware that You know us in our eternity, that our darkest secrets are as noonday in Your sight, and that our weak explanations do not excuse us our sins. Pardon us, we pray, not because we meant well, or because we are deserving in and of ourselves, but only because of Your grace as made real in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Amen.

5. Simon of Cyrene was made to bear the cross;

Simon physically took up Jesus' cross as they made their way through the streets of the city. Simon would later remove the weight of that cross from himself and place it once more on the back of Jesus. After having taken up the cross for that short time, I pray that Simon did find eternal life in Heaven with the Father as a follower of Jesus.

“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26).

6. Christ's face was wiped by Veronica;

7. His second fall;

Prayer of Intercession: We pray for all those who are sick, asking that they may receive healing by the stripes Jesus bore upon Himself.

We pray for children who are being kept at home, and may be made afraid by the uncertainty around them, asking that You, their Comforter, make Your calming and protective presence known to them.

We pray for people who find it difficult to control their tempers, who struggle with spousal abuse, or who find themselves struggling in solitude with loneliness or depression that You will renew their mind and that they may feel Your loving touch upon their lives.

We pray for those who work in service to others, who exemplify Your commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves, that You will fill them and show them mercy, protecting those they love that they may focus on their many tasks.

And we pray, Almighty God, for elected officials all over the globe, who guide our society and world in search for effective ways to deal with crisis and management in these unmanageable times. We hope that our faith will keep us strong Lord, as we lean on Your control, as Sovereign over all our struggles and problems. We call on Your creative and righteous judgement and guidance to lead us through, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

8. He met the women of Jerusalem;

9. His third fall;

Jesus warned the people that those things they treasured, the Temple and city in which their security rested, would be destroyed. Often the Lord warns us not to put our trust in things, or in people (*Psalm 146:3*), for they cannot preserve our lives or souls after death.

“The high places of wickedness will be destroyed—it is the sin of Israel. Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover their altars. Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Cover us!’ and to the hills, ‘Fall on us!’” (Hosea 10:8).

When this prophecy of the destruction of the city came true some years later, many of the women in the crown were still alive and remembered Jesus’ warning to put their trust not in a person or a physical thing, but instead put their trust in God and let the Lord lead them (*Proverbs 3:5-6*).

10. He was stripped of His garments;

Jesus took ridicule and shame upon Himself so that those who rely on Him can find the strength to face the consequences of their sins, walk free of the burden of guilt and one day stand before the Lord unashamed, clothed in righteousness.

“For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.” (Psalm 22:16-18)

11. His crucifixion;

The debt incurred by all humanity was to be paid, in full, with the eternal, Divine blood of God made flesh, once for all mankind, in order to restore our relationship with God (*1 Peter 3:18*). He was lifted up among the reprobate and repentant, giving each an opportunity for emancipation.

“Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12)

Jesus cried out, *“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” (Matthew 27:46),*

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent” (Psalm 22:1-2).

“I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. “He trusts in the LORD,” they say, “let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.” (Psalm 22:6-8).

“Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me. Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.” (Psalm 22:13-20).

12. His death on the cross;

The sky grew dark:

“In that day,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight” (Amos 8:9).

Jesus was not murdered. He freely gave up His life for you.

“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” (John 10:18).

“It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last” (Luke 23:44-46).

13. His body was taken down from the cross;

His death was deliberate, and successful in fulfilling its purpose, as God knew it would be:

“All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it.” (Psalm 22:27-31).

14. He was laid in the tomb.

It is appointed to all people to one day die (*Hebrews 9:27*), and then to move on to eternal life.

“He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth” (Isaiah 53:9).

Closing Remarks: God is in control. He knows the beginning from the end. He had foretold the death resurrection and burial of His Son Jesus a millennia before Jesus’ birth, and He is still in control. God knows our current situation. He has seen it and prepared for this moment, urging us to reach out to the lost, as it is not His will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (*2 Peter 3:9*), and receive Him as their Lord and Savior.

You have a choice. Some of you have made the choice to secure your eternal soul in Christ, trusting on His efforts. Others of you may still be hanging on this decision, on whether or not to believe that Jesus is who He says He is and has done what He has done. I pray that you examine the truth, examine your heart, and choose to entrust your soul to Jesus for your eternal salvation.

The work is done, *“It is Finished” (John 19:30)*. I pray you ask Jesus to come into your heart and be your Lord and Savior, that you receive all that has been accomplished for you, all that has been laid up in heaven for you, all that the Lord has planned for your life, and that you will then share the Good News of Jesus’ sacrifice with those you love and then to all whom you encounter.

May your eternity be assured, through Christ, Jesus. Amen.

Hymn: (*Shared by our sister in Christ, Victorine, based on Isaiah 49:15-16*)

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me” (Isaiah 49:15-16).

1. I can never abandon you.

I can never abandon you.

I have written your name on the palm of My hand.

I can never abandon you

2. You are the apple of My eye,

You are the apple of My eye.

Whoever touches you touches Me.

I can never abandon you.

3. When I lift My hands I can see your image,

When I lift My hands I can see your image.

I can never abandon you.

I can never abandon you.

Benediction: You have remembered today how Christ died for you; now go forth to live for Him.