

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

This evening we will read and reflect on the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ. Let us begin with a word of prayer.

OPENING PRAYER**Kenny Rigoulot**

Loving God, we are huddled in our homes: some of us are filled with fear and doubts; some of us are bored out of our minds; some of us are physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually exhausted; many of us are craving connection in this season of isolation; all of us are in need of an encouraging word of hope. Remind us that even though you command us to pick up our cross and follow you that you have been this way before. You have been cut off from your family and friends, you have been cut down by people in power, and your life was cut short. Remind us that in your saving death and resurrection you open the way to eternal life and assure us that nothing can separate us from your love. As we read and reflect on your word, bring us closer to you and to each other. We pray these things in the name of our crucified and living Savior, the one who taught us to pray, saying...

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Mark 15:1-47

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. ²Pilate asked him, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' He answered him, 'You say so.' ³Then the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴Pilate asked him again, 'Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you.' ⁵But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

⁶ Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. ⁷Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. ⁸So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. ⁹Then he answered them, 'Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?' ¹⁰For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. ¹¹But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. ¹²Pilate spoke to them again, 'Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?' ¹³They shouted back, 'Crucify him!' ¹⁴Pilate asked them, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Crucify him!' ¹⁵So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

¹⁶ Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. ¹⁷And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. ¹⁸And they began saluting him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' ¹⁹They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. ²⁰After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

²¹ They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. ²²Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). ²³And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he

did not take it.²⁴ And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

25 It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him.²⁶ The inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.'²⁷ And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left.²⁸ Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days,³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!' ³¹In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself.³² Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.' Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.³⁴ At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' ³⁵When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.'³⁶ And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.'³⁷ Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.³⁹ Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

42 When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath,⁴³ Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.⁴⁴ Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time.⁴⁵ When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.⁴⁶ Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb.⁴⁷ Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.

SERMON

Rev. Kenny Rigoulot

I want to start by saying that the coronavirus was not sent by God to punish us or teach us a lesson. It is not meant to be a sermon illustration. This virus is a naturally occurring event that is devastating lives. But that does not mean that we cannot learn from it. We can learn things about ourselves and our world that we are usually too busy to notice. We are being reminded of how fragile and interconnected we all are. We have an opportunity to relate with those who have felt cut off from others even before this era of social distancing. We are being reminded that Jesus came to show us how far God is willing to go to relate to us. Jesus reveals what anxiety sounds like in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus reveals what injustice looks like in a courtyard before Pilate. Jesus reveals what isolation feels like in a jail cell. Jesus dies on the cross to show us that God knows what it is like to live and God knows what it is like to die.

I recently read a story about the family of Hoang Dinh Nguyen in Seattle. Nguyen was a seventy-two-year-old man afflicted by Covid19. In his seven decades of life, he survived an escape from North Vietnam, a refugee camp in Indonesia, immigration to the United States, two strokes, and cancer. He was married and raised 7 children. A few weeks ago, his family was stunned to find out that he was going downhill quickly with a novel coronavirus.

Nina Shapiro, a journalist for the Seattle Times wrote an article chronicling the final hours of Nguyen's life. The family gathered their cars in the hospital parking lot close to midnight. Some rolled down their windows, some popped their heads out of sunroofs, and others stood in a circle, spreading out to maintain social distancing. After the priest led the family in prayer, he took Nguyen's wife, Ty, and their daughter, Crystal, inside the hospital. When Ty saw her husband, she thought she was too late to say goodbye. His skin was discolored, but he was just barely breathing with the help of a ventilator. A nurse named Judy was with him, wearing a mask below her glasses, protective head covering, gloves, and a yellow gown covering her from neck to shins to wrists. Since the priest was

not permitted to enter the room, Nurse Judy stood in for him. She dipped a Q-tip into some oil and made a cross on Nguyen's forehead and hand. The priest called out instructions and recited prayers through a walkie-talkie. Nurse Judy gestured to Ty to press her hand against the window. The nurse held up her own hand to meet it on the other side of the glass and put her other hand on one of Nguyen's feet — connecting husband and wife... A respiratory therapist came in to help disconnect the ventilator. Crystal used the walkie- 4 talkie to talk to her dad. While his eyes remained closed, she saw his chest move. Crystal called those in the parking lot by video group chat with her phone and held it so they could see Nguyen. "We love you daddy," they called out as Crystal broadcast their voices through the walkie-talkie. When death came, Crystal said, her dad knew everyone was there, "that the coronavirus that is isolating everyone was not going to stop my mom or me or my siblings from seeing him at the very end."

On this night, we remember the crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. He came to show us how to live and love God, one another, and ourselves. He literally embodied the love of God. Love is vulnerable. It is risky to put ourselves out there in an effort to connect. But if we don't take that risk, if we refuse to vulnerable, we will be unable to make any deep or meaningful connections. God wants to connect with us so deeply, that he took on flesh and became one of us. He knew that he was taking a big risk. He knew that he could, and indeed, would be hurt. Jesus became one of us and experienced both joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, loss and love. He died on the cross to show us that nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even death itself.

Jesus is the one who connects the father to his children. Just as Nurse Judy reached out to Mrs. Nguyen and touched Mr. Nguyen, Jesus reaches out to us and holds us in his hand, assuring us that God is with us and will never leave us nor forsake us. Jesus is the bridge that connects the human and the divine.

As Christians, we are the body of Christ and we are called to do the will of Christ and share the love of Christ. How are you being invited to connect the father to some of his children?

God did not send the coronavirus to teach us a lesson, but that does not mean that there are not lessons we can learn. We are being confronted by our finitude and frailty, our interconnectedness, and our need for God and one another. Our hearts are heavy as we envision a hospital room where a family uses all their resources to share their love with their father. Our hearts are touched as we witness an overworked nurse finding the strength to stretch out her arms to bridge the divide between loved ones. Jesus stretches out his arms to show us just how much God loves us. Jesus takes us to a place where death is real, death is painful, but death does not have final word. In this season, we are being shown hard truths about our world and ourselves. Perhaps this will be the moment when we finally realize God has been there, living and dying and living and dying and living with us. Amen.

HYMN No. 228

"Were You There"

*BENEDICTION

*After the Benediction, the Christ candle is carried out of the sanctuary.
Then all depart in silence as we look forward to Easter morning.*