

**Balzac United Church**

**April 3, 2026, 10:00am**

**Guest Minister: Rev. Ruth McArther**

**Music Ministry: Lee Dowan, Dr. Alex Shawn**

We travel the path of the Cross to be there with Jesus so that he is not alone. We dare to re-tell the harsh story of this day because we know the ending, and the ending is not death. Yet let us pause here for a while and absorb the powerful truth of this story. These are familiar voices that we hear in the scripture. We are the voices in the story. Let us reflect on our participation in the story so we might ever more celebrate the new life offered to us in his resurrection.

**Gather**

**Prelude**      *Lead me to the Cross*                      arr. T. Beaney

**Introit**      *Jesus, Remember Me*                      VU 148 x2

**Welcome & Announcements**

**Land Acknowledgement**

**Witnessing the Christ Candle**

**Choir Special**      *Jesus Died Alone*                      arr. J. Raney

**Drama of Voices**

**Opening**

**JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA** (*speaking quietly and firmly*): Hello. My name is Joseph; I am from Arimathea. You know, no one knows where that town was. Perhaps that's best – my part in the gospels is a small one, almost an insignificant one. Where I come from is not important.

And yet, all four gospels tell how I was present at the time of the crucifixion. I didn't do much – indeed, no one really knew I liked Jesus' stories. I liked his message. I liked the things he taught. But, you understand, I was important in the community. What would people have said if I had spoken up for him? I was a member of the council, you see and could have voted against putting him to death. But then so could Nicodemus, and he didn't either. It wasn't worth it.

Or was it? I wish I knew. So I did the best I could – I offered my tomb. Some will say, "too little, too late" And perhaps they are right. But it was something, I suppose.

So come, on this sad and heavy day, and listen again to the story. And imagine your place in it all. Reflect with me on how we could do things differently, on how the things we say and do proclaim the words of Jesus in our world.

### **Opening Prayer**

**MARY, WIFE OF CLOPAS:** I was one of the women who watched – who dared to stand until the end. I watched them nail Jesus to a cross, watched them abuse him to death. You have no idea what it was like, but I knew I had to stay there – to support his mother, and Mary Magdalene, and stand witness that, just as Jesus would not run away, we would not, either. Will you join me in prayer?

**Prayer:** With heavy hearts and a heavy world,  
we meet you this day/this dark night, O Christ.  
In your clenched hands,  
stretched and nailed,  
you gather us.  
In holy sorrow,  
we find silence our only friend.  
With strength only you can give, even now,  
and with a courage only you can know,  
may we find ourselves beside you, O God.  
And as life teeters and eternity weeps,  
may we see through love's pain,  
into love's promise and love's destiny.  
And may we even now,  
even now, hear the echo.

### **Scripture**

**MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS:** I am Jesus' mother. Perhaps you are only used to me as a quiet character in the Christmas story. But I never went away – I stayed with Jesus through his ministry, challenging him when he needed it, and comforting him when he needed it. You will meet me again in one of the first stories of the early church, where I was a part of the group that decided we would carry on. I could only do that because I was there this day. Like Mary, the wife of Clopas, I could not turn my head away – I stood and watched, too. Do you know what it is like to watch your child die? To stand helpless as they beat him almost senseless, and caused him pain beyond my worst imagining? But I stayed. There was nowhere to go.

Listen, now, as I recount the story of Jesus' last hours.  
*(Reads **John 18:1–11.**) The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus*

*(Reads **John 18:12—14.**) Jesus Before the High Priest*

*(Reads **John 18:15—18.**) Peter Denies Jesus*

*(Reads **John 18: 25-27.**) The High Priest Questions Jesus*

*(Reads **John 18:28—40.**) Jesus Before Pilate*

*(Reads **John 19:1-42.**) Jesus sentenced, Crucifixion, and Burial*

**Hymn** *Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?* VU144 vs.1,2

### Response

**PILATE:** I am Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. Yes, I know, you think I could have stopped it. And maybe I could have – but the crowd was so huge, and their anger was so intense. I’m sure you know what that’s like – the newspapers are full of stories of masses of people carrying a mood to extremes. I mean, I know I had the army and all that, but there must have been hundreds, even thousands of them. I could only do so much, you know?

I asked him why he was there, what it was all about. Was he trying to overthrow me? Did he want to sit on a throne somewhere? His answers didn’t make any sense: “I’m here to proclaim the truth,” he said. I don’t have time for that! I have to maintain order and discipline.

They could have had me release him, but they cried out for Barabbas. My hands were tied. You know what that’s like, don’t you? Some boats are just not worth rocking.

**Hymn** *Were You There...* VU 144 vs. 3,4

**Offering Invitation** *Valley* arr. R. Summers

### Confession

**NICODEMUS:** It is only John who tells my story – three small glimpses – but they say so much. Perhaps you can relate. My name is Nicodemus; you may recall that I went to see Jesus one night, filled with questions. What did he mean by being born again? Was someone like me – a leader of the people, an upstanding figure in the religious community, someone who had studied long and hard to find answers to life’s problems – was I supposed to start over? It seemed preposterous.

He said something curious to me: God’s Spirit goes where it will. It does what it wants – does what it must. I didn’t really understand it then.

Some time later when Jesus was speaking in Jerusalem, people were arguing: could he be the Messiah? I wanted the other leaders to give him a fair hearing, but they just

sneered and said “the Messiah can’t come from Galilee.” I held my tongue after that. And look where it brought us: to this moment.

It was with a heavy heart that I brought some myrrh and ointment for his body. How might things have happened if I had acted differently? What if I had spoken up and said, “he doesn’t deserve to die”? What then? I was afraid they would kill him anyway, and perhaps me as well (*pause*). Now I suppose we’ll never know.

### **Assurance**

The Good News is that the Voices of God’s People have been heard this way before. We can take comfort from that knowledge, knowing that we will be given what we need to be faithful, justice, and compassionate in this time of uncertainty at the foot of the Cross. Thanks be to God. Amen

**Hymn**    *Were You There... (vs 5)*

### **The Lords Prayer**

### **GOING FORTH**

**I AM MARY MAGDALENE:** I, too, was one of the women who stayed. What else could I do? Jesus had changed my life beyond measure.

I was despised before I met Jesus, and after as well. My name is Mary and I come from Magdala. I was one of the women who followed Jesus, and we were not treated well. As Jesus spoke of how God’s view of the world included all people, we felt welcome. The men tried to include us, but they had grown up in a world that didn’t give us much time and attention, and sometimes they resented that there were women in the group of followers.

I had struggled for many years with ailments that made it hard to function. Some say I had demons; I only know that I would have fits from time to time, and Jesus put an end to them. I was forever grateful and stayed with him out of appreciation for what he had done. I wanted others to know that the message he brought and the things he did offered new life and new hope to all of us.

And yet I also knew that it would not last. No one can proclaim the things that Jesus did without raising serious opposition. No one can keep declaring that God’s love is for all people, without those in power and control needing to put a stop to it. Imagine! If the world understood that we are all sisters and brothers in God’s family, what might it be like?

History has not been kind to me – because I was such a powerful testimony to the message Jesus brought, they discredited me, claiming I was a prostitute and calling me

all sorts of horrible things. As you know, that's not the story the Bible tells. Only that I was Jesus' friend.

I will come back. When the Sabbath is over, I shall return to this tomb and spend time with Jesus once again. I will come here often and pray that he might still speak to me and guide me. Will you do that?

### **BLESSING**

#### **Recessional**

*Stay With Me*

VU950 x2

#### **Postlude**

*The Old Rugged Cross*

arr. M. Hayes

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