

Ground our being (*not that, not that*),
Ruler of All (*not that, not that*)
though *Father*, we can say, though *Mother*,
since from the first breath
we have loved those names.

In our need, in our joy, we have spoken to You,
Little intimate conversations,
Who knew us since before we were born.
Nothing we would not say to You
Who know all the rivers we are.
Nothing in us that does not flow to You.

Into Your hands, though Your hands are the sky,
into Your heart, though Your heart is all flowers...
See, we cannot imagine You!
And *since* we cannot imagine You—
Immensity, forgive us, then.

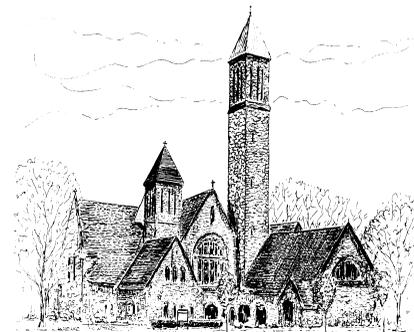
With what does not die,
With what in us does not know how to die,
We come.
Like children,
Like leaves before the wind.
Father. Mother. To You.

—“*The Seven Last Voices*” are by Michael Dennis Brown in response to
“*The Seven Last Words of Our Savior on the Cross*” by Franz Josef Haydn.

HYMN 102 “Were You There?” *Were You There*
Extinguish the final candle

The congregation is invited to sit silently in the darkness until the candle is relit and carried out of the chapel. Then, as you desire, you may leave the chapel silently, reflecting on what you have seen and heard and on the wonder of Christ’s death.

Thank you to our readers Mark Armesto, Olga Rico-Armesto, Nancy Barry, Karen Frieder, Lucas Lloyd, Lou Ann Luther Riegle, Sue Snyder, Stephanie Smith, and Roger Woodard.



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The mission of historic First Church is to bring diverse people of metropolitan Buffalo together to follow Jesus Christ through worshiping God, fostering spiritual growth, and serving the community.

IT IS OVER. IT BEGINS.

GOOD FRIDAY
APRIL 18, 2014

*Wherever ♦ appears, you are asked to stand if you are able to do so.
Text in **bold print** indicates congregational responses.*

♦HYMN 85 “What Wondrous Love Is This” *Wondrous Love*

SCRIPTURE: John 12:21-27, 30

POEM: Holy Sonnet XI *John Donne*

Spit in my face, you Jews, and pierce my side,
Buffet, and scoff, scourge, and crucify me,
For I have sinn’d, and sinne’, and only He,
Who could do no iniquity, hath died.
But by my death can not be satisfied
My sins, which pass the Jews’ impiety.
They kill’d once an inglorious man, but I
Crucify him daily, being now glorified.
O let me then His strange love still admire;
Kings pardon, but He bore our punishment;
And Jacob came clothed in vile harsh attire,
But to supplant, and with gainful intent;
God clothed Himself in vile man’s flesh, that so
He might be weak enough to suffer woe.

—E. K. Chambers, ed., *Poems of John Donne: Vol. I* (Lawrence & Bullen, 1896), p. 163

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

O Christ, who forsook no one but was forsaken by the closest of friends, and who committed no crime yet was sentenced to a criminal’s death, we enter your presence in awe and adoration. On this day, centuries ago, you could have saved your life, but you refused to betray the purpose for which you had been born. You had come into the world to love God

and neighbor as yourself; this was the love for which you had been created, and when that love required you to shoulder a cross, you summoned the strength to bear it. Today, O Christ, as we sing and pray about the cross, teach us its meaning once again and help us to take up our cross and follow you. Amen

—from *Litanies and Other Prayers: For the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A*. Phyllis Cole and Everett Tilson. © 1989, 1992, Abingdon Press, p. 70, alt. Adapted by permission.

THE SEVEN LAST WORDS OF OUR SAVIOR ON THE CROSS

1. “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Scripture: Luke 23:32-38

Poem: “House” by Michael Dennis Browne

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

“Pater, dimitte illis; non enim sciunt quid faciunt.”

You are descending stairs—
down and down and down.

Slowly, as in a dream.

You have never wanted to go this deep,
but the House of Forgiveness is large.

As if you were among the roots of oaks.

Up there, storms;
you know the branches grind and shriek,
but here no groaning, only this quietness,
as of whales asleep.

Is this down here the dream?

Or is it up there, where you do
things as wild as, wilder than,
those plunging branches?

All hates, little and large, that you hold,
let those winds sweep them from you,
send them as leaves down the street,
let *these* deeps murmur to you,
wary of them as you were
(and now their salt
washing your wounds clean).

Forgiveness—has she lived here all along?

Out of her blood once you came,
and so soon you hissed away from her,
from whose body you began by drinking
before you learned any words
to distance yourself from her.

Apples. Olives. Table. Door. Dust. Rain.

It is over.

The whale in her deeps. The hawk, circling.

Scar. Cut. Bruise. Vein. Pulse. Bone.

Over.

Mud. Straw. Coins. Dawn. Twigs. Wind.

Your mother's songs. Your father's stories. Games with the little friends.

Over.

The sheep with their bells. The goats—of course the goats.

Hands. Lips. Bread. Fingers. Tears. Healing.

It is over. Pockets emptied of minutes and hours and days.

Mercy, the oil.

Mercy, the womb.

Mercy, the breath.

Over.

Now go to Mercy herself.

The One who always strengthened You.

The One in whom there was nothing You could not do.

Waves rolling onto the shore, sliding away.

It is over. It begins.

It is over. It begins.

Riddles Blessings. Teachings. Streams. Leaves. Birds.

(Maybe the birds go with You.)

Now, how can we not know what must die in us?

What must grow less?

What lives?

It is over. It begins.

It is over. It begins.

Extinguish one candle. Silence

7. “Father, into our hands I commit my spirit.”

Scripture: Luke 23:44-49

Poem: “Pantokrator” by Michael Dennis Browne

“Father, into Your hands I let go my spirit.”

What did not begin with You?

What goes back to You has always been with You—
in Your hands, we say, but *not that, not that*,
we know You are Spirit, that there are no hands,
and when were we ever not in them?

How do we return to You?

Lord, You, even You, even if You are there in some lost corner of my heart,
calling like a mad bird, I do not hear You. Instead *I* call and call.
Am I still Your bird, even if I am a mad one?
My God, My God, I always knew You were with us. Now do I know?
Mother, mother of my mother, mothers, can you tell me anything beyond my
own question with its thousand mouths: Why?
When I was a child, always they told me there was light, that the light was
real, but was hidden. And now?
Hidden is beating its drum, its drum, its drum.

Extinguish one candle. Silence

5. "I Thirst"

Scripture: John 19:28-29

Poem: "Line" by Michael Dennis Browne

"I thirst"

"*Sitio*"

I do not know how long the line is. I know I am not the first of the thirsty,
not the last. The line goes round the world.
Cracked the lips of the children; the lips of the mothers, the lips of
the fathers.
The belly is a begging bowl, a shallow little thing. It trembles, but we are not
to see that. (Only surgeons, like ravens high above the body, could look
down and in.)
These are lives in which rain has not fallen for years: no steady slow soaking
of rain in the night, no loosened earth, no fragrance, no flowers unfolding,
no silky lotus with all its leaves unfurled.
Lord, now that we know You thirst, what is our own dryness but Yours?
Yours but ours? You thirst, since You are with us, even till the end of time,
Your bowl no bigger. With us in this line.
Did you tremble in Your own abandonment? I have imagined Your wounds
so wide that small animals ran there to hide from the hunters—nothing. You
could do about it, nothing you would have chosen to do, even if Your hands
had not been nailed to wood.
No creature too small for You to be its savior, to take upon Yourself its thirst.
The line goes round the world. Your world.

Extinguish one candle. Silence

6. "It is finished."

Scripture: John 19:30

Poem: "Over" by Michael Dennis Browne

"It is finished."

"*Consummatum est.*"

And why such a stranger here?
Why have you lived away?
Why only a guest in these rooms?
Descending now, breathing this darker air,
what is to be done
other than watch and listen
out of the heart she gave you?
Now windows are being opened,
you feel it everywhere,
and what is this fragrance
all through the air?
It is forgiveness.
Forgiveness and her flowers.

Extinguish one candle. Silence

2. "This day you will be with me in paradise."

Scripture: Luke 23:39-43

Poem: "Thief" by Michael Dennis Browne

"*This day you will be with me in paradise*"

"*Hodie mecum eris in paradiso.*"

At least they did not cut off my hands
and leave me helpless.
At least they have only killed me,
Where you go, now I go.
You said: come with me,
you shall be with me.
You said: I know the paths.
So: I will follow you.
All I know is that we die
here together.
All I can do is trust you,
tied as I am beside you.
My own crimes, I know.
Too many, too often.
What was yours?
Was there the one only?
A large one?
(They seem to have made
larger wounds in you.)
At dawn light this morning—

it was so cold, remember?—
I did not know that now
I would be walking these paths with you.
Are we near water?
I think I see boats,
hear what sounds like ropes,
slapping against masts
within a harbor.
This going with you,
I already love.
As a boy,
I never knew the names of trees,
but these are cedars.

Extinguish one candle. Silence

3. “Woman, behold your son!”

Scripture: John 19:25-27

Poem: “Mother” by Michael Dennis Browne

“*Woman, behold your son.*”

“*Mulier, ecce filius tuus.*”

I thought I had my son in this life.
And now, you give me another.
When did you ever not surprise me?
It was not always an amazement
I would have chosen,
but each time, like a dream, it was there
and I belonged to it.
Do I hold *this* one to my heart?
Is that what I must do?
As if forgiveness were not already enough,
already so much,
now this?
Was there ever a time you did not ask of me
more than I thought I could do?
I have never dreamed myself as large
as you presume me to be.
Really, there are only so many rooms.
You never let me live my only life;
you never did.
But in all you have asked of me,
I did not fail you and I will not now,

even now, though this is hardest,
here in this place where you suffer so.
When I said yes—so long ago—
to be your mother—
I was young, young—
how could I have known
what this would ask of me?
And could this be the last asking,
as you die before me?
I hardly think so.
I never knew how much
could break in me,
and still be green.
And now you say, my son:
Behold your son.
You cannot ask it, and you do.
Here I am.

Extinguish one candle. Silence

4. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Scripture: Matthew 27:45-50

Poem: “Tsunami” by Michael Dennis Browne

“*My God, My God, why have You abandoned me?*”

“*Eli, Eli, lamma sabacthani?*”

The sea has taken everything. What has the sea *not* taken?
The sun looks like a scar, the birds like scars in the branches—where there is
any kind of tree.
Why is there nothing? (The something, as it just was, was never so much.)
Why is there now nothing?
Why is there another day after this one? Then another, then another?
What are the nights for? Yet I prefer the sky dark, so I never expect a sun. I
prefer the poor light of stars.
Dar, or light, there is nothing left to dream.
My God, My God, I cannot begin to ask what You were thinking.
I cannot begin to dare to imagine that You might have turned away
just a moment from the world, even that You were beginning
to think of a different world, wearing of this one...
I cannot believe that for even a moment You drew back Your heart from
us. Why, then, this *heartlessness*?
We have been betrayed not only by the sea, but especially the sea.
Everything we had is broken; everything known.