



## WE GATHER

*"Garden of Gethsemane" on the ladder-garden with bowls of water and communion elements...*

### Prelude Music & Prayer Stations (Labyrinth)

#### Threshold

*Leader:* Tonight in our Maundy Thursday service, we gather with Jesus in the Upper Room. There is only one other place in the Gospels where the Greek word used to describe the Upper Room was also repeated—the place, the room where Jesus was born. Two places where the dark birthed something new... the dark womb and the dark tomb. We follow a tradition of "tenebrae" or "darkness" tonight, descending with Jesus into the depths of our own stories of grief, disappointment, and betrayal. During the whole season of Lent, we have focused on growing gardens, tending the life that is right in front of us, rather than constantly climbing ladders of what this world defines as success. We have been embracing "good enough" lives and "good enough" selves that are worthy of love, no matter what. In our worship this evening commemorating the last night Jesus spent in community with his disciples, we see a supper in which Jesus showed his beloved friends, and shows us, what "blessing" really means, *regardless of the circumstances to come.*

#### Calling on God

*Based on Psalm 116*

*Leader:* Let us pray together:  
Holy One, You who lay a table of blessing before us,

**you have heard us and have come to us.**

We lift up the cup of salvation in praise,

**we break open and share our love.**

Open us this night to your presence

**in our gardens of delight and sorrow–**

in the simple and good enough moments that fill our days.

**Amen.**

## **Song – Here I am to Worship**

### **Video – Mara – Upside Down Easter (Skit Guys)**

#### **Thoughts about an Imperfect Life and Faith**

“We are blessed, regardless.”

For Jesus, these moments in the Upper Room were full of trouble, danger, deception, and uncertainty. In the midst of the pain, Jesus defines real blessing –washing feet, breaking the bread, lifting the cup, sharing even with those who are about to betray him. In this moment of silence, take in this graceful invitation of Jesus to come to the table, no matter what. Love that cannot be quantified reminds us that each and every person is blessed, always, regardless of who we are, how we’ve failed, or what we’ve accomplished.

Know that already, God is offering us freedom from never feeling good enough for all the blessings of life and faith, inviting us to love and to bless in the same way– indiscriminately, extravagantly.

And know, that despite our sometimes faltering steps, in the name of Jesus Christ, you are being forgiven, even now.  
Glory to God! Amen.

We don’t live in a culture of *blessing*. We live in a culture of #Blessed.

Beautifully plated restaurant meal #Blessed. Christmas card professional photo shoot where everyone is looking directly at the camera wearing matching pj’s? #Blessed.

As Christians, we cross-stitch our blessings on pillows, hand-letter them in whimsical fonts, and tattoo them on our bodies, forgetting, perhaps, that Jesus turned the idea of what makes us blessed upside down. His blessings should leave some people wide-eyed, and others with tears of relief streaming down their cheeks.

Jesus says, blessed are you when you are at the end of your rope. When you are exhausted and despairing. When tears are your food, morning and night. When your stomach grumbles and your mouth is dry. Blessed are you who forgives the person who never said sorry and who definitely didn't deserve your forgiveness. You who are ridiculed and humiliated, left out and left behind. The timid and the soft-spoken. The one who works toward peace instead of the easy road of vengeance.

So much of how we interpret these blessings depends on where we are sitting when we hear them.

Maybe we are like the respected and applauded religious leaders in Jesus's time. We've elbowed our way to the front row, or perhaps we were ushered in by privilege and birthright. We say and do the right things. Our righteousness is on full display on Instagram. Our chest puffs with pride at how well life has worked out—our beautiful family, our comfortable bank account, our healthy body. These beatitudes should make us uncomfortable. Because God is celebrating who we try so hard *not* to be. *Dependent. Needy. Desperate.*

These blessings will sound quite different if you're the one at the back of the crowd. The one who barely feels like you belong in the first place. The one who's scared someone will find out that you don't have it all together.

Jesus often taught by taking something conceptual and comparing it to something concrete. For example, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field" (Matthew 13:44). To his hearers who grew up in farms and fields, this would be tactile, not just intellectual. It's a rhetorical device that doesn't need detailed notes or a tape recorder. You'd remember.

In these blessings, it's like Jesus is pulling examples from the very people listening in. "Blessed are you, Jamie, even when you mourn the person you lost." "Blessed are you, Sarah, though you are struggling to find hope." "Blessed are you, John, when there isn't enough to feed your family."

He was looking into the eyes of those who felt like the misfits. And then used the everyday experiences of weeping, hungering, thirsting, suffering as a badge of belonging.

The left out will be welcomed with a warm embrace. The forgotten will not just be remembered but honored. The ones who don't have it all together are exactly who God is inviting into the kingdom. In fact, the whole kingdom belongs to the ones on the edges. This is the upside-down kingdom—directly available to those of us who don't have it all together.

Sometimes the only thing that's possible is to bless life's every present moment—even, and especially, the hard ones. Blessings in those moments fall like a summer rain over the driest times and places in our lives. And though a blessing seems counterintuitive in moments of grief and sorrow, that's when you need to be reminded of the presence of God most—the God whose kingdom is available to all of us.

The world looks a bit strange from here, upside down. But maybe it's how it's supposed to be: our feet rooted in heaven.

## A Blessing for When You Don't Feel #Blessed

***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

***Blessed am I*** when I lose sleep over what troubles me. When my worries keep me watching the clock tick by. When I have no energy to do anything but fret. The kingdom of God is here and now.

***Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.***

***Blessed am I*** when I am drowning in grief. When wave after wave after wave crashes over me. When I start to feel okay, then something reminds me of what I've lost, and I'm pulled under once again. God promises to comfort me.

***Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.***

***Blessed am I*** when I feel silenced and afraid to speak up. When I am forgotten and left out. When I feel small and feel as though my work, my presence, my life doesn't matter. The whole world is mine.

***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.***

***Blessed am I*** when I am starving for justice. When the world around me feels so unfair that I could scream, but no one seems to be listening. No one seems to care. May justice flow like a river.

***Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.***

***Blessed am I*** when someone hurts me, when I feel offended, and I don't return insult with insult. Instead, I forgive, recognizing the number of times I've needed to be forgiven.

***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.***

***Blessed am I*** when I strip away all the extra. When I see the world as it really is—broken, tender, fragile, beautiful. These are the same eyes that see God in everything too.

***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.***

***Blessed am I*** when I take the hard road. The winding one that doesn't opt for the shortcut of rage or resentment or unkind words. That doesn't pave over with trite niceties, but walks toward peacemaking. For I am God's child.

***Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

***Blessed am I*** when I face hardships of all sorts. Insults, hurt feelings, lies, and vindictive neighbors (why is loving your *actual* neighbor so hard, God?).

***Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.***

**Blessed am I** when I work to usher in God's kingdom of love and compassion and justice and forgiveness and peace, even when it's hard.

***Blessed are we. The imperfect and don't-have-it-all- together. God's beloved.***

## **Song – You are my King (Amazing Love)**

### **(Invitation to the Upper Room)**

*John 13: 1-17, 31b-35*

*Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.*

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."*

*Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."*

*After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."*

### **Communion**

On the night in which he gave himself up for us,  
Christ took bread, gave thanks to God, broke the bread,  
gave it to his disciples, and said:

“Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.”

When the supper was over, he took the cup,  
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

“Drink from this, all of you;  
this is my blood of the new covenant,  
poured out for you and for many  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this, as often as you drink it,  
in remembrance of me.”

**Music playing – Cathy Hardy’s “Take, O take me as I am” during the love feast as participants move forward at their own pace to kneel and pray**

### **Song – Broken Vessels (Amazing Grace)**

#### **Service of Shadows**

*Reader 1: He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.” Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” [Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.] When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”*

*Extinguish first candle*

*Reader 2: While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said to him, Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?” When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, Lord, should we strike with the sword?” Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!”*

*Extinguish second candle*

*Reader 3: So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Judean authorities seized Jesus and bound him. First they led him to Annas; for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had given counsel to the religious authorities that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.*

*Extinguish third candle*

*Reader 4: Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, while Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman who guarded the gate said to Peter, "Are not you also one of this man's disciples?" He said, "I am not." Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves; Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.*

*Extinguish fourth candle*

*Reader 5: The high priest then questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. Jesus answered him, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jewish people come together; I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said." When he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, bear witness to the wrong; but if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.*

*Extinguish fifth candle*

*Reader 6: Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him, "Are not you also one of his disciples?" He denied it and said, "I am not." One of the servants of the high priest, a kinsman of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" Peter again denied it; and at once the rooster crowed.*

*[The sixth candle is extinguished]*

*Reader 7: Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered him, "If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed him over." Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The religious authorities said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." This was to fulfill the word which Jesus had spoken to show by what death he was to die.*

*[The seventh candle is extinguished]*

## **Video – Pilate Upside Down Easter (Skit Guys)**

### **Song – Once Again**

*Reader 8: Pilate entered the headquarters again and called Jesus, and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the religious authorities; but my kingship is not from the world.” Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” After Pilate had said this, he went to the religious authorities again, and told them, “I find no crime in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover; will you have me release for you the King of the Jews?” They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” Barabbas was a robber.*

*[The eighth candle is extinguished]*

*Reader 9: Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and dressed him in a purple robe; they came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again, and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him.” So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him.” The religious authorities answered him, “We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.” When Pilate heard these words, he was even more afraid; he entered the headquarters again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin.”*

*[The ninth candle is extinguished]*

*Reader 10: Upon this Pilate sought to release him, but the religious authorities cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar.” When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat. Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. He said to the religious authorities, “Behold your*



*King!" They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." They handed him over to them to be crucified.*

*[The tenth candle is extinguished]*

*The Christ candle is walked down the aisle and taken out of the room.*

Leader: After the following blessing, you are invited to leave in silence and keep vigil throughout the night.

### **A Blessing for When You Mourn What Could Have Been**

*Blessed are you, friend, sitting among the shards of what could have been. It is broken now, that dream you loved, and it has spilled out all over the ground. Blessed are you, dear one, letting your eyes look around and remember all the hope your dream once contained. All the love. All the beauty. Blessed are you, telling your tears they can flow. Telling your anger it can speak. Blessed are you when mourning is the holy work of the moment, for it speaks of what is real. Blessed are you, letting this loss speak all its terrible truth to your soul.*

*Blessed are we who mourn, saying let us remain in grief's cold winter for as long as it takes, that mourning might be to our hearts the gentlest springtime. Let the thaw come slowly, so we can bear the pain of it and find comfort at each release. Amen.*

*[the people leave in silence]*