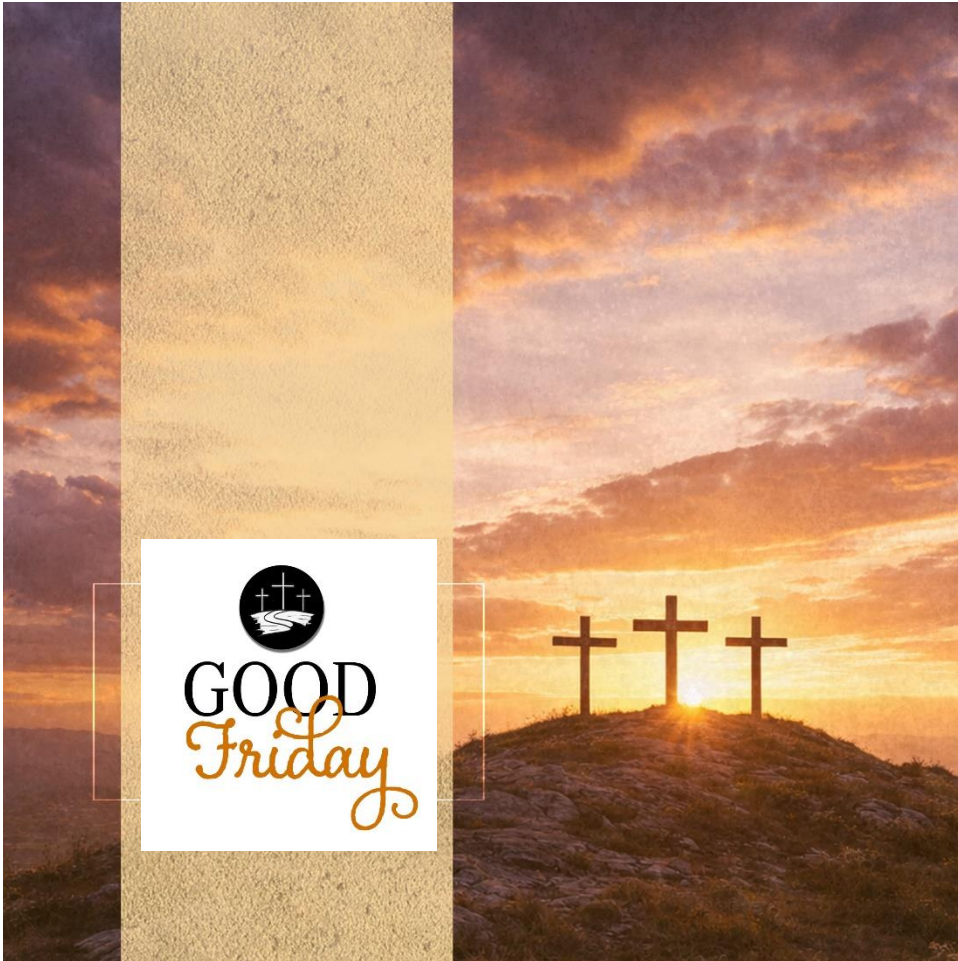


**FIRST ENGLISH LUTHERAN CHURCH
ST. PAUL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
ST. MARK'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
Wapakoneta, Ohio**



**Good Friday
April 3rd, 2026**

PRELUDE

At The Cross/I Surrender All

by Matt Redman, Jonas Myron, Chris Tomlin, Ed Cash, Matt Armstrong & Winfield S. Weeden arr Mary McDonald

GREETING

Vicar Michelle Kouse

“Dark Before the Dawn” Posted by: Melissa Bane Sevier

If we never experience the darkness, the light doesn't mean so much. A lit candle after the power goes out helps us find our way in the dark. But a candle lit in a bright room, even though it may look lovely, is not as important and meaningful. Once a year our worship service takes us to a meal in an upper room where a friend turns traitor, to a garden of hard-fought prayer and then arrest, and to an execution. Once a year we peer into the abyss and we remember those whose suffering was mirrored on the cross: the oppressed the dying, the unjustly accused, the deserted, the hopeless. Once a year we leave our place of worship in darkness, pondering the silence. (brief silence)

GATHERING PRAYER

Vicar Michelle Kouse

Let us pray. Holy God, as we gather in the shadow of the cross, we come not with answers, but with honesty, bearing our sin, our sorrow, and the weight of this broken world. Draw us near to the suffering of your Son, so that we may see in his wounds the truth of our broken condition, and the depth of your love. Hold us in this sacred darkness, and do not let us turn away too quickly from the cost of your grace. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

READING: Psalm 23

Georgeann Stienecker

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²**He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.**

³He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

HYMN

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us (ELW 789)

READING: James 5:13-17**Pastor Doug Pretorius**

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have the pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise the up, and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

LADIES' CHOIR*O Sacred, Wondrous Love* by Heather Sorenson

At this time, we will now offer meditation in the shadows. After each meditation is shared, when you hear Lord have mercy, respond with Christ have mercy.

Meditation: “Facing the Shadows, A Tenebrae Drama” by John van de Laar**Monologue 1: *The Shadow of Betrayal* – Judas****Pastor Doug Pretorius***(Based on Matthew 26:20-25)*

I don't know when it happened, but things changed somehow. At first He was strong, confident, outspoken. I had such high hopes – finally, a leader to throw off the Romans!

But, just when the time was right – at the height of His popularity, He withdrew. He became quiet, almost introspective. I thought a bit of a push would help Him to reach for greatness. You know, pass on a bit of information about His movements (and make a bit on the side for me), and then watch Him rise to victory when they came for Him ... only, it didn't work out like that. He let them take Him.

“You'll betray me, Judas,” He said. I wonder how He knew – I thought I'd been discreet ... But, I didn't expect it to turn out the way it did ...

Lord have mercy... **Christ Have Mercy**

(extinguish first candle)

HYMN*Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* (Verse 1) (ELW 335)**Monologue 2: *The Shadow of Inner Agony* – Salome****Jennie Grundey***(The Mother of James and John) (Based on Luke 22:39-46)*

He was such a unique boy, my nephew. Cousin to my sons James and John, but more of a friend to them, really ... and to me. He was always caring, always serving, always putting others first. I remember when I asked Him if my boys

could sit on thrones with Him in His Kingdom – one on His left and one on His right.

“Salome,” He said to me, “The great ones in God’s Kingdom are the ones who serve. Even I have come to serve, and to lay down my life.” I felt rather humbled that day.

It’s incredible that in His time of agony, praying all alone, the ones He served so well couldn’t serve Him in return ... not for one short hour. There they were, my sons and Peter – all asleep while Jesus cried and sweated blood. And none of the others of us were any better. Alone he prayed, “Take this cup away from Me. But, not My will, Father – Yours be done.”

Lord have mercy... **Christ Have Mercy** (extinguish second candle)

HYMN

Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross (Verse 2) (ELW 335)

Monologue #3: *The Shadow of Desertion* – John

Jon Schmidt

(Based on Matthew 26:47-50;55-56)

That was a dark night. We didn’t expect those terrible things – perhaps we should have foreseen it, prepared for it. Maybe then, we would have reacted differently and stood with Him through it all.

But, we didn’t understand. So, there we were, Peter, James and me, fast asleep, oblivious to His pain, and suddenly He’s waking us up, and there is Judas, and lights and swords and soldiers. And they’re arresting Jesus! We were no match for them, and they would have taken us, too. We were terrified, and so ... we ran away. All of us and left Him to face their swords alone.

Lord have mercy... **Christ Have Mercy** (extinguish third candle)

HYMN

Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross (Verse 3) (ELW 335)

Monologue #4: *The Shadow of Denial* – Peter

Richard Yocum

(Based on Matthew 26:31-35)

What was I thinking! I expected so much more from myself. Oh, at the table it was easy. When Jesus talked about being betrayed and arrested and dying, I was angry and protective.

“I’ll fight for you, Lord” I said. “I’ll die for you.” I thought He was just frightened and emotional when He replied, “No Peter. Before the cock crows three times you will deny knowing me.”

Deny Him? I wouldn’t have thought it possible ... But that was then. Now, I know it’s true. When it finally came down to it, I couldn’t fight for Him. I couldn’t die for Him. I couldn’t even answer the question – “Yes, I know Him. I follow Him. I

believe in Him.” And as they led Him away, He looked at Me. Those eyes – I expected anger and judgement. But there was only love. In His eyes, there was only ever love ...

Lord have mercy... **Christ Have Mercy** (extinguish forth candle)

HYMN

Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross (Verse 4) (ELW 335)

Monologue #5: *The Shadow of Accusation* – Mary Magdalene **Chris Nagel**
(Based on Matthew 26:59-67)

People were curious about my devotion to Jesus, but it's easy to understand, really. I lived with accusations all my life – adulterer, prostitute, madwoman, evil possessed – they said it all and more. And much of it was true. But, Jesus, ... He didn't accuse. He didn't judge. He didn't make any demands or require anything. For the first time, someone saw past the pain and brokenness to my soul – and gave me the freedom I longed for. Of course, I was devoted! Ironic that the One who accepted and included all without accusation, should be forced to hear lies about Himself; should stand alone and face all those pointed fingers. The one whose only crime was acceptance, sentenced to death on the force of false accusations – by the ones He sought to love and heal ...

Lord have mercy... **Christ Have Mercy** (extinguish fifth candle)

HYMN

I Want Jesus to Walk with Me (Verse 1) (ELW 325)

Monologue #6: *The Shadow of Mockery* – Thomas **Ken Frame**
(Based on Mark 15:12-20)

Somehow, I've developed a reputation for doubt and questioning. A little unfairly, I think ... But, I do confess to being confused and uncertain – especially at the end.

I mean, He healed the sick, He raised the dead – the whole nation was eating out of the palm of His hand! Then, suddenly, they were shouting “crucify Him!” With all His power, He just stood there. And then, when the soldiers mocked Him, He took it all. They stripped His body of torn from the terrible flogging -- and pretended to worship Him as king with a crown of hard Judaeian thorns. They hit Him, spat on Him and pulled out His hair and beard.

How was I to understand this? He could have snuffed them out in a heartbeat ... But, he didn't. He just let them mock him.

Lord have mercy... **Christ Have Mercy** (extinguish sixth candle)

HYMN

I Want Jesus to Walk with Me (Verse 2) (ELW 325)

Monologue #7: *The Shadow of Death* – Mary, the Mother of Jesus

(Based on Luke 23:33-46)

Vicar Michelle Kouse

Should I have known that moment would come? There had been death threats from when He was a baby, and He'd spoken about His death more than once. Maybe I should have seen it, but nothing can prepare a mother to watch her child die. I don't know how I got through that day. My son, sentenced to crucifixion – the slowest and most agonizing death. Executed with thieves. My son, who had done nothing wrong.

And in the face of it all, He forgave them – forgave all of us ...

Then, He cried out, "It is finished" and as I watched that last breath leave His body, it was like it was me dying up there ...

Lord have mercy... **Christ Have Mercy** (extinguish seventh candle)

HYMN

Were You There by Darla Frame

A Moment of Silence and Reflection

***PRAYERS OF CONFESSION AND INTERCESSION** (nail dropped at foot of cross)

Pastor Doug Pretorius

Let us pray for the whole world, the lost, the forsaken, and all in need tonight.

O God, Where there is suffering, we turn our eyes. Where there is exclusion, we turn our backs. Where there is need, we turn our hearts. And yet, we know that you are among the injured and the lonely and the hungry and the poor.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Jennie Grundey

We pray for those who are suffering from disasters, loss, and overwhelming hardship, especially those affected by the floods in Hawaii and the severe drought in Texas, where crops fail, and cattle and livelihoods are at risk. We pray for those whose homes have been destroyed, whose lives have been upended, and whose hope feels distant. Hear the cries of your children, O Lord, and draw near to them in their need. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Jon Schmidt

We pray for those whose lives are torn apart by war—for civilians, for soldiers, and for families who wait in fear and longing. Bring your peace to Ukraine and Russia, to Israel, Gaza, and Iran, and to our own nation as tensions rise and the burdens of conflict and uncertainty weigh on our lives.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Richard Yocum

We pray for those whose stomachs ache with hunger. We pray for those who thirst for clean water, long for good education and health care, and are begging for a job. Provide for your children in need. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Chris Nagel

We pray for those who are imprisoned, justly or unjustly. We pray for prisoners of war, for inmates in our local prisons, people awaiting their sentence, and those who can't be released until death. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Ken Frame

We pray for those whose minds or spirits seek comfort and cannot find it. We pray for those who are grieving, those who are going through change, those battling an addiction or mental illness. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Vicar Michelle Kouse

Now is the time to let your light shine. Shine in our lives and use us to be your beacon of light in the community. Help us to give a helping hand. Give us renewed ears to truly listen. Open our arms to embrace the lost and forsaken. Move our feet to act with kindness and justice. And open our hearts to show forth your compassion. In the name of Jesus Christ we shall pray,

**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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;**

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

CLOSING PRAYER – Mary (Christ candle is lit.)

Vicar Michelle Kouse

If I was unprepared for Jesus' death, I was completely flabbergasted by what would follow ...

Thank you for joining us at the cross tonight. Before I close with prayer, we invite you to stay as long as you would like. We encourage you to leave your nail at the foot of the cross and leave in silence until we return here for Easter morning in awe and wonderment of what is come because of our faith in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, as we leave this place in silence, we carry with us the weight of the cross and the mystery of your love poured out for the world. Stay near to us in the darkness, in our questions, our grief, and our waiting. Teach us to trust what we cannot yet see, and to rest in the work you have finished, even as we wait in the darkness. Keep us at the foot of the cross, until the dawn breaks, and your promise is revealed. You who live and reign forever.
Amen.

We leave in silence.

Offering plates are in the back of the sanctuary. Please write home church on envelope.

Special Thanks to:

Darla Frame – Musician

Vicar Michelle Kouse, First English Lutheran Church

Pastor Doug Pretorius, St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Georgeann Stieneker, Jennie Grundey, Jon Schmidt, Richard Yocum, Chris Nagel & Ken Frame

Noah Kirby and Dave Curry – Audio/Visual