

## A TENEBRAE SERVICE FOR CHILDREN

The Tenebrae service is an ancient tradition held on one of last three days of Holy Week. "Tenebrae" is Latin for "darkness" and the service uses extinguishing candles to symbolize events from the triumphal entry of Palm Sunday through Jesus' burial. The service traditionally concludes in darkness and silence, sometimes with the Christ candle being carried out of the sanctuary and a loud noise symbolizing the closing of Jesus' tomb. This adaptation of a Tenebrae service is designed to help children walk through this complicated time of the church year, allowing space for emotions related to the narratives of the week. This version begins with hearing the stories, then naming them as you extinguish candles. It concludes with relighting the candles as you identify aspect of each narrative that reflect God's unfaltering love and presence. The center Christ candle will remain lit throughout.

**Preparation:** Set up a space with a purple cloth, donkey figurine, palms, a crown of thorns or brambles, bread, cups of juice (or other snack items if children do not take communion in your church), and 7 candles. Light the candles as the service begins. Have paper and crayons/markers available. The readings are sections selected to be suitable in length for children. Read slowly and pause before inviting the children to engage the story. You may choose to read some or all texts from a story Bible. Recommended versions are:

- *Children of God* (by Desmond Tutu)
- *Growing in God's Love* (Westminster John Knox Press)
- *Shine On* (Menno Media)

### The Stories

#### Remembering Palm Sunday

**Explain:** *We will be spending our time together hearing some of the stories about Jesus. On this past Sunday, we learned about people waving palms as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, because they believed he was the messiah. Palm Sunday starts what we call "Holy Week" when we remember the last week of Jesus' life. We will think about some sad things that happened, but we'll remember some happy things too.*

**Optional: Read Mark 1:1-11** if the children didn't hear the story on Sunday in Sunday school or worship.

**Engage:** Prod the children to ponder the worship space with the phrase "I wonder why [the palm, the cup etc.] is here." Allow older children to teach the younger children what they know about the items.

#### Maundy Thursday

##### The Last Supper

**Ask:** *What kinds of special meals do you have with family or friends?*

**Explain:** *We will hear the story of the last meal Jesus ate with his friends, who were called "disciples," before he died.*

**Read:** Luke 22:7-19.

**Explain:** *Jesus asked his followers to remember him when they ate together and so many Christians around the world celebrate communion or the Lord's Supper. We are going to eat a little snack together to remember how Jesus enjoyed being with his friends.*

**Engage:** Pass the bread to the children and small cups of juice. (Or use the other snack items you've prepared. Any food is fine because this activity is about sharing and remembering Jesus with his friends.)

**Ask:** *What makes you happy about Jesus? What do you think it was like to be Jesus' friend at the Last Supper?*

##### Arrest and Denial

**Explain:** *This happy time with Jesus and his friends became very sad.*

**Read:** Luke 22:39-47, 54-62

**Ask:**

- *Why do you think Peter pretended he didn't know Jesus?*
- *How did Peter feel after he pretended he didn't know Jesus?*
- *Have you ever said or done anything that made you feel very sad?*

**Good Friday (Provide paper and crayons or markers.)**

**Explain:** *Stories about Jesus are very important to us even when they are really sad. We are going to hear about some mean things that happened to Jesus and the sad way he died.*

##### The Trial

**Read:** Mark 15:1-5, 12-15.

##### The Crucifixion

**Read:** Mark 15:16-20, 25, 33-37, 42-47.

**Ask:**

• *What do you do when you feel sad feelings?* **Guide them** with questions such as: “Who do you talk to? Who comforts you?” “Where do you go when you feel sad?” “How do you show that you are sad?”

**Explain:** *Sometimes we show our sadness with tears or with words. We can even show feelings by drawing. Think about the stories and how you feel. If you want to, write words or draw on your paper.*

**The Candles Extinguished**

**Explain:** *We are going to remember each of the stories we heard and put out the candles. It will get darker and darker but this candle [point to the center candle] will keep burning to remind us that no matter what, God is always with us.*

**Name the stories, extinguishing candles as you go:**

- People were happy at first when Jesus rode into Jerusalem.
- Jesus ate a last meal with his friends.
- Jesus was arrested.
- Peter pretended he didn't know Jesus.
- Jesus had a trial.
- Jesus died.

**Ask:**

- *Does the room look different now?*
- *Does the room feel different now?*

**Explain:** *Sometimes stories make us feel things. When I read these stories I felt kind of sad and angry. Sometimes I feel those feelings in my stomach [or wherever you feel them in your body].*

**Ask:**

- *What feelings do you think the people who loved Jesus had?*
- *How do you feel? Where is that feeling in your body?*

**Explain:** *God gave us many different feelings. Whatever we feel is okay. Let's spend a little time together just feeling whatever we feel.*

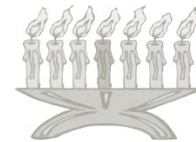
**The Candles Relighted**

**Explain:** *The stories we heard are from Bible books called “Gospels.” Gospel means good news. We are going to remember the stories and the parts that are good news, that remind us that God is always there, even when bad things happen.*

**Name the good news in the stories, relighting candles as you go:**

- *The people who celebrated when Jesus rode into Jerusalem were right. He was the Messiah.*
- *Jesus ate a last meal with his friends before he died, but a few days later, when Jesus was alive again, he cooked breakfast for his friends over a little fire and ate with them again.*
- *Jesus was arrested, but when the soldiers saw him die, they were sorry and told everyone that Jesus really was the son of God.*
- *Peter pretended he didn't know Jesus but Jesus still loved him. Peter became very brave when he saw Jesus alive again and he told everyone the story of Jesus so they would believe in him too.*
- *Jesus was never alone. His mother and close friends were there with him. Jesus prayed on the cross for strength because he knew that God was always with him.*
- *Jesus didn't have anywhere to be buried so Joseph of Arimathea gave him a place.*
- *[Point to the center candle] And we know that we are never alone. Jesus is always with us. So we kept this candle lit to remind us of the best good news—Jesus died, but he rose again to show us how much God loves us. But for now, we remember that Jesus died, so after we pray together, we will leave quietly and wait for Easter Sunday when we will celebrate Jesus being alive again.*

**Pray:** *God, you made us. We are thankful that you gave us feelings. Sometimes our feelings, like sadness, anger and being afraid, are hard to have. But we know we are safe, no matter what we are feeling. We know you are with us and you love us. Amen.*



Adapted by Cassandra Williams with thanks to Anita Peebles.  
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