Finding the Words:
Words for Worship

CBF LITURGY AND WORSHIP AIDS

SEASON OF LENT, GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 2026
TENEBRAE, A SERVICE OF SHADOWS

Liturgical Color: none, black, or red

Lectionary readings:
Isaiah 52:13-53:12
John 18:1-19:42

Opening quote: (for bulletin or screen)
"Christianity has always insisted that the cross we bear precedes the crown we wear."
James H. Cone, The Cross and the Lynching Tree

[For this Tenebrae (or "shadows") service, begin with 6 pillar candles and the Christ candle lit on a bare or black-shrouded altar. The candles will be extinguished one by one as the Passion story is told, ending with the extinguishing of the Christ candle. Sanctuary lights can be dimmed along with each candle's extinguishing. The congregation is dismissed in shadow and silence, to await the dawning of Resurrection Day. The readings and extinguishings offer chances to involve many congregants. Where appropriate, intergenerational family and friend groupings within the church may lead effectively.]

Call to Worship:
One: Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases,
All: yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.
One: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way,
All: and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
One: By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
All: Who could have imagined his future?

Invocation:
On this strangely named "Good" Friday, O God, we gather in stillness and deepening shadows to consider again the depths of injustice this world can plumb. On this Good Friday, we gather to discover again the depths of love your heart can contain. Even in the shadows, God of Love, we wait for you to meet us here.

Hymn: What Wondrous Love Is This?

First Reading: John 18:1-12—Jesus is betrayed and arrested
First candle is extinguished.

Hymn: O Sacred Head, Now Wounded (vv. 1-3)

Second Reading: John 18:13-24—Jesus interrogated at High Priest's
Second candle is extinguished.

Third Reading: John 18: 25-40—Peter denies Jesus, Pilate questions Jesus
Third candle is extinguished.

Fourth Reading: John 19:1-16a—Jesus mocked, Pilate surrenders to will of Chief Priests, Jesus condemned to death
Fourth candle is extinguished.

Hymn: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

Fifth Reading: John 19:16b-25a—Jesus is crucified
Fifth candle is extinguished.

Sixth Reading: John 19: 25b-30—women and John at the cross, Jesus dies
Sixth candle is extinguished.

Hymn: Were You There? (vv. 1-3) OR He Never Said a Mumbalin' Word

Seventh Reading: John 19:31-42—Soldiers pierce Jesus' side, Jesus' body is claimed, prepared, and buried
Christ candle is extinguished.

Benediction:

Beloved, here in the deepest shadow, in the depth of injustice, we wait; here in the depths we wait—for what love might still do.

[Clergy leave the pulpit and sanctuary in silence to model a somber exit for congregation.]

Hymn suggestions:

What Wondrous Love Is This—text Anon., WONDROUS LOVE
O Sacred Head, Now Wounded—text trans. J. W. Alexander, PASSION CHORALE
When I Survey the Wondrous Cross—text I. Watts, HAMBURG
Were You There?—text African American Spiritual, WERE YOU THERE
He Never Said a Mumbalin' Word—text African American Spiritual, [They crucified my Lord]

Art suggestions:

Christ Crucified, John Petts, 16th St. Baptist Church, Birmingham AL USA,
https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57342

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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