



SYLVAN UNITED CHURCH



Good Friday



April 3, 2026

the good news is...

revealed through nonviolence



**GOOD FRIDAY MEDITATION WALK
THROUGH THE GARDENS**

The Good News is revealed through non-violence

You are invited to go on your own walk through the gardens around the church. It is a meditation walk — a journey through the gardens, through the story and through your own heart.

In the walk, there are seven pauses.

For the first four, please feel free to wander to any place in the gardens that draws you and pause there a while with your meditation.

*For the last three pauses, there are specific places to pause – the **Labyrinth**, the **Church doors**, the **Heather bank** in front of the church.*

On Good Friday, we remember that though when Love walked among us, we did not recognize him. When Peace stood before us, we chose force. When God came close, we turned away.

And yet — Jesus came anyway.

*As you move through the gardens and this meditation, you will be invited to pause at various places in the garden. At each stop, you are invited to pause, reflect, and consider: **Where am I in this story?***

You are invited to carry a stone with you. At one point in the journey, you will be invited to leave it behind as a sign of release.

Move slowly. There is no rush. When you are ready, begin. When you have completed your meditation, feel free to return home, or linger a little while longer. May this time be a blessing to you.

PAUSE ONE

The Kiss

Luke 22:47–48

While Jesus 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?”

Judas steps forward.
The garden is quiet.
A kiss breaks the silence.
“Friend, do what you are here to do.”
Betrayal does not begin with distance.
It begins with nearness.
With fear disguised as wisdom.
With self-protection disguised as necessity.

Reflect

- When have I stayed near to Jesus but drifted from his way?
- Where have I chosen comfort over courage?
- Where have I convinced myself that compromise was harmless?

Hold your stone. If something rises in you — regret, unease, recognition — imagine it being absorbed by the stone.
Let the stone begin to carry what you see.

Jesus does not step back.
He receives the kiss.
Stay a moment.
When you are ready, move on.

PAUSE TWO

A Sword

Luke 22:49–51

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.

John 18:10–11

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus.

*Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath.
Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"*

Steel flashes in the dark.
Drops of blood fall to the ground.
It is instinctive to defend.
Instinctive to strike.
Instinctive to believe that force will protect
what we love.
Jesus says, "No more of this."
And he heals the wound.

Reflect

- Where do I react before I pause?
- What anger rises quickly in me?
- What do I grip tightly — certainty, control, being right?

Hold your stone again. If defensiveness, fear, or anger surface, let them be absorbed, in your imagination, into the stone.
Let its weight increase.
Violence promises control.
Jesus chooses healing.
When you are ready, continue.

PAUSE THREE

Pointing the Finger

Luke 22:52–53

*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 though I were a rebel?
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!"*

Luke 23:18–25

Then they all shouted out together, “Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!” (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city and for murder.) Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.”

But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified, and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

A finger points. Charges are spoken.
A cross is commissioned.
Some violence is loud. Some is orderly.
Some is written into systems.
Some is simply “the way things are.”
The chief priests insist. Pilate hesitates.
The crowd shifts. And a cross is built.

Reflect

- Where do I feel powerless in the face of larger forces?
- Where do I quietly benefit from what I did not create?
- Where do I look away because the cost of seeing feels too high?

Not all are called to the same work.
Not all are called to visible action.
But all are called to let faith shape more than Sunday morning.
If discomfort rises —if there is something you wish were different in yourself —let the stone absorb that too.
You do not need to fix it now.
Simply be honest. Breathe. Then move on.

PAUSE FOUR

Mockery

Luke 23:35–37

And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”

They divide his clothes.

They cast lots.

They laugh.

“If you are the Messiah... save yourself.”

Cynicism is easier than hope. Mockery is safer than vulnerability.

Indifference costs less than love.

Sometimes we harden because disappointment has worn us thin.

Sometimes we disengage because caring feels endless.

Reflect

- Where has hope felt naïve to me?
- When have I dismissed goodness because it seemed unrealistic?
- What sorrow still shapes my resistance to love?

Look at your stone. If cynicism, exhaustion, or quiet grief surface, let the stone absorb that too.

Notice its weight now.

You have not been asked to defend yourself.

Only to tell the truth.

When you are ready, continue.

PAUSE FIVE

The Cross (*in the Labyrinth*)

Stand at the entrance of the Labyrinth

Luke 23:33–46

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.” He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun’s light failed, and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Having said this, he breathed his last.

Reflect

Here stands the cross.

You have carried your stone through betrayal, reaction, systems and sorrow.

Feel its weight.

This stone holds what you have seen —fear, anger, silence, regret, fatigue, longing for change.

Jesus knew this would happen.
He came anyway.
He knew love would be rejected.
He loved anyway.
He knew violence would answer him.
He refused violence anyway.
"Father, forgive them."
This is strength deeper than retaliation.

Now walk the path of the Labyrinth to the centre and place your stone at the foot of the cross and leave all that you put into the stone there.

You are not placing it there because you are condemned. You are placing it there because Christ has already chosen mercy.

Lay down your stone

*As you walk the path out of the Labyrinth, let your hands and your heart, feel lighter.
Given thanks for love, for forgiveness.*

PAUSE SIX

Water

(go to the Baptism Font, at the church doors)

John 19:34

One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water poured out.

Romans 6:3–4

Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.

From his pierced side flowed blood and water.
Water —the sign of birth. The sign of cleansing.
The sign of belonging.
Before we ever chose him, we were marked by water. Before we understood grace, we were washed in it.
This water is before you, dip your hands in the water. Remember your baptism.
Remember that you are loved. Embraced. Forgiven Named Beloved.

Christ's mercy is deeper than our failure.
Violence does not have the last word.
Sin does not have the last word.
Fear does not have the last word.
Grace flows.
Peace persists.

Reflect

- What is one small way I can embody Christ's nonviolent love?
- In my speech?
- In my choices?
- In my relationships?
- In the courage I am willing to practice?

When you are ready, move toward the final pause.

PAUSE 7

Silence Before Dawn

(go to the bank of Heather in the front of the church)

Good Friday tells the truth.
We see ourselves here —betrayers, defenders, bystanders, cynics.
We see how far we fall.
And we see how far God will go.
Jesus stands. Tearful. Steady.
Peace is taking root in wounded ground.

This is not yet Easter. The tomb waits.
The silence of Saturday stretches long.
But something has already begun.
The Heather grows.
Water flows.
Grace remains.

Leave this place quietly.
Carry honesty.
Carry humility.
Carry beauty.
Carry courage.
The dawn will come.

Go in quiet courage.
May the peace of Christ
take root in you,
flow through you,
and grow beyond you.

Poem - High Waving Heather, Emily Brontë

High waving heather, 'neath stormy blasts bending,
Midnight and moonlight and bright shining stars;
Darkness and glory rejoicingly blending,
Earth rising to heaven and heaven descending,
Our spirit away from its drear dungeon sending,
Bursting the fetters and breaking the bars.

All down the mountain sides, wild forest lending
One mighty voice to the life-giving wind;
Rivers their banks in the jubilee rending,
Fast through the valleys a reckless course wending,
Wider and deeper their waters extending,
Leaving a desolate desert behind.

Shining and lowering and swelling and dying,
Changing for ever from midnight to noon;
Roaring like thunder, like soft music sighing,
Shadows on shadows advancing and flying,
Lightning-bright flashes the deep gloom defying,
Coming as swiftly and fading as soon.

*Some material taken from and adapted: Rev. Ann Lytner "Tell Me
Something Good" by A Sanctified Art*