

Tenebrae

Tenebrae is the Latin word for "darkness" or "shadows." It is also the name of an unusual and significant act of worship designed for the evening of Good Friday and other Holy Week days as required.



One of the most conspicuous features of the service is the gradual extinguishing of candles until only a single candle, considered a symbol of our Lord, remains. As it gets darker and darker we can reflect on the great emotional and physical pain that Jesus suffered. Toward the end of the service, the Christ candle is hidden, typifying the apparent victory of the forces of evil over good. At the very end, a loud noise is made, symbolizing the earthquake at the time of his death (Matthew 27) and his resurrection (Matthew 28:2). At the moment of the earthquake, the temple veil was torn apart, making the Holy of Holies exposed to public view. This is understood to represent God's change toward us with direct access to him, no longer requiring the ceremonial acts of the priests for our forgiveness of sin. The hidden candle is then restored to its place, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil before we leave the church in silence.

We plan to hold a service of Tenebrae at 9.30pm on Good Friday, in place of Compline. You are warmly invited to attend and experience this special act of worship.

To prepare for Tenebrae we will need the following-

1) The Tenebrae Candleholder with seven candles located in the altar area plus an additional Christ candle (eight candles in total). The Christ candle and possibly one or two others should be next to the lectern to permit sufficient light for reading of the scriptures.

2) one candle snuffer

3) one very faint torch for reader to use for reading Matthew 27:51-54 when all candles are out.

4) Carefully prepared paperwork at the lectern for each of the readers to use.

5) Percussion will be produced by stamping feet and clashing cymbals. It is used at the point of Jesus' death. After the Christ candle has been silently and

slowly carried from the altar down the centre aisle of the church out of the worship space, total darkness remains. After about a few seconds of total darkness and silence, the percussionist will bang the cymbals again three times, and will then slowly and quietly reduce to silence. Immediately there will be one large crash of the cymbals. The sound should die to a deafening silence. After another period of silence (darkness continues) the person will return to the worship space with the Christ candle still lit and place it back in the stand and then sit down. The next scripture is then read.

6) In rotation of years the passion can be read from other gospels. Year A is the year of Matthew.

7) There are many variations of this service of Tenebrae and there are some splendid musical arrangements by great composers, one of the most striking of which is by Gesualdo. This particular example does not employ any music.

8) There will be a need for a group of people to work together to make Tenebrae happen effectively. It will require rehearsal and so if you would like to participate, please speak to Neil or Peter Hounsell soon.

