



SILENT WITNESSES



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SERVICES
FOR LENT

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ABOUT THE SERIES

The thorns, the robe, the nails, the spear, the shroud, the stone—if these things could speak, what might they tell us? Silent Witnesses is a series of six services for Lent in which the chief speaker each week takes the role of one of the things associated with our Lord's suffering and death, describing and interpreting the events and their meaning from that object's point of view.

These six complete worship services include everything you need with the text of the sermons (dialog or monolog format) and orders of service in .rtf (rich text format), newsletter/bulletin notices, hymns, visual media recommendations, contemporary music song suggestions and PowerPoint documents of all the services, with images and text (along with a copyright release) for use on screens.

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SERVICES FOR LENT

ASH WEDNESDAY: THE THORN

COMPLETE SCRIPT FOR WORSHIP LEADERS

- If desired, an **Environmental Projection** is shown on a screen or on the walls of your worship space to set the tone for the service before the service begins or throughout the service at various points:

[shutterstock.com/image-photo/wooden-crown-thorns-on-light-background-2333710451](https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/wooden-crown-thorns-on-light-background-2333710451)

- This **Theme Verse** is read aloud by the pastor at the start of the service or is read silently by the congregation before the service begins:

And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head... John 19:2

- The **Opening Litany and Hymn** are spoken responsively by the pastor and the congregation and sung in unison to the tune Jesu, Meines Lebens Leben 87 87 88 77:

Ⓟ In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets,

Ⓞ **but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.**

Christ, the life of all the living,
Christ, the death of death, our foe,
Christ, yourself for me once giving
To the darkest depths of woe:
Through your suffering, death and merit
Life eternal I inherit.
Thousand, thousand thanks are due,
Dearest Jesus, unto you.

P No one has ever seen God.

C **The only Son, who is at the Father's side, he has made God known.**

P The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

C **We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.**

P Therefore, we must pay close attention to what we have heard.

C **It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him,**

P while God himself also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles

C **and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will.**

P Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely,

C **and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,**

P looking unto Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith.

C **For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Heartless scoffers did surround you,
Treating you with shameful scorn
And with piercing thorns they crowned you.
All disgrace, Lord, you have borne
That as yours you might now own me
And with heav'nly glory crown me.
Thousand, thousand thanks are due,
Dearest Jesus, unto you.

P “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.”

C **We are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.**

P When we cry, “Abba, Father,” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God,

C **and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.**

P “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations.”

C **We are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.**

P “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be my witnesses.”

C **We are witnesses to all that he did. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree,**

P but God raised him up on the third day and made him manifest,

C **not to all people, but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses.**

Christ, the faithful Witness, sharing
Living words from God above;
Christ, yourself the Word, declaring
All the wonders of God’s love:
Let your Word, rich fruit now bearing,
Be the seed of my declaring.
Grant, O Lord, that I may too
Faithful witness bear for you.

- The **Imposition of Ashes** takes place at this time, according to local custom.

- The **Prayer of the Day** is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

P Dear Jesus, with sadness we witness you crowned with thorns. Yet, you go silently forth to the cross for us. Thank you for the pain you bore and for the suffering you willingly endured for our salvation. Help us to be filled with love for you and comfort in the knowledge that your sacred head was wounded so that we might be healed. Amen.

- The **First Lesson**, Isaiah 52:13-15, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

- The **Psalmody**, from Psalm 22, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Ⓒ **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? I have cried desperately for help, but still it does not come. During the day I call to you, my God, but you did not answer; I call at night, but get no rest.**

Ⓟ But you are enthroned as the Holy One, the one whom Israel praises.

Ⓒ **Our ancestors put their trust in you; they trusted you, and you saved them. They called to you and escaped from danger; they trusted you and were not disappointed.**

Ⓟ You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

- The **Second Lesson**, 1 Peter 1:3-9, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

- The **Theme Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune Were You There 10 10 14 10:

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
 Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
 Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
 Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crowned his head with thorns?
 Were you there when they crowned his head with thorns?
 Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
 Were you there when they crowned his head with thorns?

- The **Sermon**, based on John 19:1-3, is delivered by the pastor:

There were many witnesses to the events that took place on that hill outside Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago.

An angry crowd gathered to be certain that *their* verdict of “guilty” be carried out in the sentence of death by crucifixion.

A small group of the condemned man’s followers milled about the crowd; still in shock over the injustice being meted out, many of them kept their identity secret to protect themselves from a similar fate.

Some *had* to be there—those responsible for tending to the necessary tasks which went along with an execution.

But there were other witnesses there as well, witnesses we don’t usually think about, although they were even closer to the events than the crowd. In fact, they actually *participated* in those events in unique ways. They were the Silent Witnesses. If only these things could speak! What might they tell us about the events from *their* viewpoint?

Throughout this Lenten season we will be given the opportunity to hear them.

[Note: This presentation may be offered as a dialog involving two persons. In that case, the interviewer speaks the parts indented and printed in *italics*. It may also be presented as a monolog simply by omitting the italicized portions.]

Excuse me. I wonder if you could give me just a few minutes of your time. I feel a little silly talking to a thorn; yet, if we are to have a complete picture of what happened here, we can’t overlook any sources. I understand that you witnessed some unusual happenings concerning the one called Jesus of Nazareth; is that true? Would you mind telling us your impressions of what took place? Just relax and tell the people what you recall.

Hi! Er, I mean, hello. I'm really not used to this idea of talking, especially in front of people. But since I have been asked to give you some information about myself and how I happened to witness the death of Jesus...

Please try.

Well, it was terrible! I just can't imagine how humans could treat another human being that way.

Just relate the incidents, please, without editorial comment. Perhaps you could begin by telling us about yourself.

I'm sorry, I'm getting ahead of my story. Well, I am definitely not considered to be popular. In fact, I am often considered to be "a pain." The only time people seem to want to find me is so that they can cut me down and burn me. The general opinion is that I, and my kind, are worthless and have no real purpose for living.

Come now, we all have some purpose. We weren't created just to "be." We were given life for a...well, for a purpose.

I have to confess that according to the standards of others I am not what you'd call "desirable." There are other plants that have a beauty I wish I had. They are fragrant and pleasing to the senses. I just kind of stick out like the proverbial "sore thumb." I'm bare, pointed, grow every which way, and look like a haystack in a tornado. To add insult to injury, I'm not useful either.

Useful?

I don't make the countryside look pretty. I'm not even good food for the animals. In fact, the animals try to avoid me. I often cause them pain and possible infection; what good is that? I am worthless! No one cares about me! People take my name in vain, if they speak of me at all. When someone wants to describe a person as being ugly, they call him "a thorn among the roses." Or if someone has a nagging problem, they say that they have "a thorn in the flesh." Now, with that kind of image, how can I be expected to consider myself worth anything at all? Wouldn't you be depressed too?

My, you really are down, aren't you? But please, just tell us what happened.

Oh, I'm sorry. Let me start from the beginning...I was just hanging around on the vine, cutting the gentle breeze as it blew by me, when I noticed some soldiers coming across the field toward me. I saw them draw their swords as they got closer. "Oh, no! This is it," I thought. "Today is the last day of what used to be the rest of my life!" I was right. They hacked and chopped and cut many of the vines down. The branch I was on was one of those cut and carried back to the barracks. I was surprised they hadn't just set fire to us out in the field; that's what people usually did. "They have something special in mind," I thought.

Something special?

The next thing I remember was that someone was taking the branches that held us and was twisting them into a circle. We were being woven and wrapped in and out, and I was getting dizzy. What really struck me as peculiar was that we thorns were actually working together for a change, instead of each one pointing and going its own way. We were still a bit disorganized, but at least we formed a circle.

Was anything said while this was taking place?

As the men were working, I heard one of them say that they were making a crown. I looked around and saw no one making anything that looked like what I understood a fine crown to be, with jewels and gold and a beautiful shape. The closest thing to a crown shape was...wait a minute! You don't think that they were shaping us into a circle in order to make a crown out of us so-called mean and ugly thorns, do you? Now that's a sharp one! But that's exactly what they were doing. I figured they'd been in the hot sun too long, but they were serious. They were shaping us into a crown!

What happened then?

When they finished, the soldiers took their primitive attempt at crown-making and carried us into a courtyard. Wow! Can you imagine what it was like to be going through all of this? Here I am—a crude, rough, despised thorn—being made into a crown and taken right into the middle of the most important government building in the city. Now that's something to make you sit up and take notice!

What did you notice?

I stretched as far as I could to get a good look at what was going on. It was hard for me to see since I had ended up on the bottom of the crown, pointing down. That's always the case: on the bottom and aimed in the wrong direction. That's the story of my life. Oh well, at least I was part of a crown. (I need to learn to look for the good news instead of always finding the bad news and then feeling sorry for myself, I guess.)

But what did you see when they carried you in?

I was able to see a large crowd gathered in the courtyard. My guess was that some king, or governor, or prince, or somebody really important was going to be crowned with this—I mean with us...now, wait a minute! Don't you find this a bit unusual?

It's more than "unusual"; it's bizarre. But please, go on.

The soldiers carried us into the very center of the courtyard. All eyes were on us. I couldn't see anyone who looked like a king or prince. In fact, the only one who even caught my attention

was an itinerant preacher who was on trial for blasphemy. I had heard those making the crown say they thought he was innocent, but that he didn't stand a chance of getting a fair trial. They said he needed to be "taken care of"—whatever that meant. Anyway, we were brought over to the "preacher." And as we got closer, I had a strange feeling come over me. I can't explain it, but I know I felt it. Here I had been cut down, twisted and bent, and I should be getting weaker and weaker since my roots were back there in the field. But I was feeling stronger and better instead of weaker and worse.

How do you explain that?

I haven't understood any of this so far, so why try now? Two soldiers took us carefully in their hands and held us high for all to see. Some other soldiers put a very fine robe on the accused preacher, and they all laughed and jeered him. Would you believe?—some even spat on him! I mean to tell you, people hate us thorn, but no one ever spat on me! Then the soldiers holding us moved us toward the head of the man on trial. As they began to set us on his head, I couldn't help but think that they really needed to be careful.

Careful?

After all, if they set us down too hard, they might scratch and hurt him.

Oh.

Now remember, I'm on the bottom of the crown, and I could see us getting closer and closer to his scalp. I wished I had some brakes or could slow us down so we wouldn't hit his head hard and hurt him...I got a glimpse of his eyes as we were being lifted by his face.

His eyes?

They showed a love and caring that made me want to care about him and...well, if a thorn could... love him. The least I could do was try *not* to hurt him. But I had no control over the situation. The men brutally shoved us onto the head of the innocent victim. We thorns were pushed into his scalp with a sense of hatred and ridicule, driving the crown deeper and deeper. How could they do this? How could men be so cruel to someone who showed only love in his eyes? In that split instant when I was forced into his forehead, I went through more emotions than any thorn has ever experienced. After the initial horror and disgust, I felt toward those who used me in this inhumane way, I went through a change of feelings, a change in character and being.

I'm not really sure I know what you mean.

I told you how horrible it was to realize that I was inflicting pain on that innocent man, and that I had personally hurt him and caused him to bleed.

Yes?

And yet, it's impossible to describe what else I felt...but let me try. As the crown was being placed on his head—remember now, I was on the bottom of the crown; I was one of the first thorns to touch his flesh—at that instant there was a feeling that shot through me that is beyond anything I had ever felt before. There was a sense of life and living that surpassed even being attached to my roots in the field. It was a different and new life, flowing around me. It caused me to feel warm and soft...Now imagine that!—a harsh, sharp, rigid thorn feeling warm and soft! It wasn't my natural me; it was beyond the natural me. It was something that came from him to me. Here I was inflicting pain on him, and he was causing warmth, love and peace of mind to flow into me at the same time. How illogical!

How bizarre!

How wonderful! He returned love for pain. He gave warmth in a blizzard of hatred. He poured out his blood of suffering in order to warm a worthless thorn like me. What kind of man was this? He was not like the other men, and he caused me to be unlike the other thorns. How blessed I have been to be able to touch the flesh of such a person! How thankful I am that my natural sharpness, stiffness and worthlessness were transformed into warmth, comfort, softness and immeasurable value by him. I didn't deserve any of these gifts

[Pause]

Yes?

Well, that's what happened. At least that's the way I witnessed it. But I can't tell you all of this without making one last comment

Please! We're anxious to hear what you have to say.

I envy you humans! Oh, don't get me wrong; I'm thankful and content with my role, but oh, how blessed you are! I know now that the same blood that spilled onto me has washed all of you and changes all of you who will simply receive your undeserved gift. How blessed you are that you are invited to live with him...forever! Imagine an eternity to experience what I had for just a few moments! You see, he did all of that, let it all happen, for you! If a thorn could pray, I'd pray that you would discover that and never forget it.

Thank you for your testimony!

Oh, by the way: if you find these changes difficult to believe, let me ask you one question: Have you ever noticed that some thorn bushes have roses on them?

- The **Hymn of Response** is sung by the congregation to the tune Aberystwyth 77 77 D:

Savior, when in dust to you low we bow in homage due;
 When, repentant, to the skies scarce we lift our weeping eyes;
 Oh, by all your pains and woe suffered once for us below,
 Bending from your throne on high, hear our penitential cry!

By your hour of dire despair, by your agony of prayer,
 By the cross, the nail, the thorn, piercing spear, and torturing scorn,
 By the gloom that veiled the skies o'er the dreadful sacrifice,
 Listen from your throne above; hear your children, hear in love!

By your deep expiring groan, by the sad sepulchral stone,
 By the vault whose dark abode held in vain the rising God,
 Oh, from earth to heav'n restored, mighty, reascended Lord,
 From your throne bend down and see: Let us share your victory!

- The **Apostles' Creed** is spoken in unison by the congregation:

☩ I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

- The **Offering** is collected at this time. If desired, this **Motion Background** (purchased by you from Worship House Media: worshiphousemedia.com) is presented on a screen at this time for reflection on the theme of the service:

worshiphousemedia.com/motion-backgrounds/17937/thorns-flicker

- The **Prayer** is spoken responsively by the pastor and the congregation:

☩ Lord Jesus, we have pierced you.

☩ By our actions and our attitudes we brought you shame and untold agony.

P Yet, even in our sin, you let your precious blood be shed, that we might now be washed and clean.

C **Lord, by that holy washing change us now, we pray.**

P Remove from us all that is hard and bitter, all that would hurt and destroy,

C **and fill us with the warmth of your own love.**

P And let your Holy Spirit so empower and direct us that we may never willingly bring shame or pain on anyone or you.

C **Help us to see your holy purpose in the things that we must suffer and endure, and give us grace to serve you there in all we are and do.**

P And make us faithful witnesses to this, your dying, ever-living love,

C **that all your children everywhere may strive together to proclaim that you alone are King and live as those in whom you live and rule. Amen.**

- The **Lord's Prayer** is spoken in unison.

- The **Benediction** is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

P Witness the Lord bless and keep you. Witness the Lord make his countenance shine upon you and be gracious unto you. Witness the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you his peace. Amen.

- The **Closing Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune Herzlich Tut Mich Verlangen (Rhythmic) 76 76 D:

O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, thine only crown.
O sacred Head, what glory, what bliss till now was thine!
Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call thee mine.

What thou, my Lord, hast suffered was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression, but thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve thy place;
Look on me with thy favor, vouchsafe to me thy grace.

What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest Friend,
For this, thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?
O make me thine forever! And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love for thee.

Be near when I am dying, O show thy cross to me!
And, for my succor flying, come, Lord, to set me free:
These eyes, new faith receiving, from thee shall never move;
For he who dies believing dies safely in thy love.