

Good Friday Begins at Christmas or Jesus' Nail was Your Nail

INTRODUCTION and setup: The following Good Friday Service uses the Christ Candle as the climax of the service. At Sycamore Tree Church we light the Christ Candle on Christmas Eve, and even after the Christmas season, we light the Christ Candle every Sunday through Good Friday. For this Good Friday Service to be truly effective, the congregation will need reminded often that it is the Christ Candle that's being lit.

You will need a box of nails for the first Sunday of Lent. We used masonry nails (flat nails) so they look a bit more "1st Century." On the first Sunday of Lent give everyone a nail. I used a book called "The Nail" available through Creative Communications for the Parish. The main goal of this six weeks in Lent will be for the congregation to focus on that nail. Ask them to carry it in their pocket or purse everyday till Good Friday. Each week remind them that the nails that pierced Jesus were their nails. In "The Nail" there is a different theme each week.

1. This is your nail – It's your nail to carry for the next six weeks. It's your nail to put in your pocket or change purse so that everytime you touch it you are reminded of what Christ did for you on the Cross. This nail is your nail.
2. Nails cause pain – Ask them if the nail they've been carrying has stabbed them at all. Remind them that just as that nail may have caused them some pain, the nails that crucified Jesus caused excruciating pain.
3. Nails cause rips & tears – Ask the congregation if anyone got a hole in their pocket since they started carrying it. Remind them that Jesus' flesh was torn
4. Nails are used to build things – Although for the last three weeks we've talked about the damage our nail did to Christ, we need to remember that even in Jesus' day nails were used primarily put things together. Talk about things that nails are used to build. Then remind them that even though our nail caused Jesus' death it also gave us life. Jesus' nails built a bridge between us and God.
5. Nails are used to fix things – Talk about all the things you can repair with nails. Then remind the congregation that the blood Jesus shed brought us forgiveness and fixed the relationship that we have with our Father.
6. Jesus' Nail was your nail – the nail in your pocket is to remind you that Jesus' blood cleansed your sins
7. PALM SUNDAY – We won't talk much about the nail today, but remind everyone to bring their nail on Good Friday

On Good Friday prepare the communion table or other table in the front of the sanctuary by putting a black cloth with several candles lit and the Christ candle highest in the center. The candles can be any color and any height. We usually remove any brass crosses or fancy candle stands as a symbol that on Good Friday the cross wasn't as beautiful as we make it out to be in the 21st Century.

To prepare the Christ Candle (see below), you can drive long nails into the bottom of it and sit it on a coffee cup warmer (the nails will warm the whole candle). It will make the nails go into it easier; however, folks can also warm their nail in the flame to make it easier to get in the candle. There is a danger that the large nails can split the candle. I drilled holes with a drill bit slowly then put the nails in.

The other thing you can do is to take the candle after the service, melt it down and remold it into a pretty candle with the nails showing on the sides to use on Easter Sunday to represent the resurrection. It's a good reminder that Jesus was resurrected but He still bore our scars.

The Service begins with upbeat praise and worship in an attempt to recreate a Palm Sunday atmosphere. The Songs we used are in italics throughout the “script”

Lord, I Lift Your Name

Every Move I Make

I Will Praise You With the Dance

Reader: 1 Whew! The excitement in those songs pretty much sums up the mood of that first Palm Sunday. It was excitement, cheering and enthusiasm that filled the path along the road that Jesus and His disciples traveled that day. Jesus had said that He came to be the light of the world and as He rode closer and closer to Jerusalem, I’ll bet people believed He really was, but as the week wore on the light mood of Sunday grew darker (*turn out top back lights*) and darker (*turn out top center lights*) and darker (*turn out top front row of lights*)

It began right after He reached the city. One of the first things He did was go into the temple and cause a fuss. He began turning over tables of those who were selling and turning God’s house into a “den of robbers.” The chief priests were not a bit happy with Him disturbing their money making efforts. And it was that evening they began the plot to make sure He didn’t cause any more trouble.

Reader 2: Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. (Matthew 26:3-4 NIV)

That’s Why We Praise Him

Reader 1: There were some high spots in Jesus’ week. He spent a lot of time with His disciples and spent most of His evenings in the home of His good friends in Bethany. He was even honored by a woman who came to anoint Him. But His week grew even darker when one of the 12 He had handpicked to travel with Him conspired with the chief priests so they could find Jesus and arrest Him in a quiet place where not many would witness it. Many have speculated, but no one knows for sure what Judas was thinking.

Reader 2: (Matt 26:14-16) Then one of the Twelve-- the one called Judas Iscariot-- went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over. (NIV)

Reader 1: So, while the other disciples were making preparations to celebrate the Passover, Judas was making plans to turn Jesus in. And on that Thursday evening, the darkness grew deeper (*turn off lower center lights*) as Judas, with a plot in his heart to give Jesus to the authorities, sat down and ate a sacred meal with the one he was scheming to have killed.

Sometime during the dinner, Judas left to alert the soldiers to Jesus' plans for the evening. And after celebrating a very untraditional Jewish Seder meal, Jesus and the rest of the disciples headed out for the garden of Gethsemane where some of His words of the evening would come to life right before His follower's eyes.

Reader 2: (Matt 26:31-35) Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same. (NIV)

Soveriegn Lord

Which brings us to Friday.

(Between the stars could be read by your pastor or a lay person, he or she could improvise or preach their own sermon. The main idea is to give a good overview of Good Friday and make the points listed below)

****** Read Matthew 27:1-2; 11-26; Mark 15:17-21; *Someone can carry in a lifesize cross as the scripture from Mark is being read. If they do, have them struggle like Simon of Cyrene would have struggled.* Luke 23:32-46; (or selections that give a good overview of the day) Have someone extinguish candles at select places

Friday . . . a fateful day . . . a day that would go down in history as “Good.” But a day that, to those who went through it, seemed anything but. Tonight we’ve gathered to remember Jesus’ death. But there are some basic facts we need to understand.

1. Even though Judas and the chief priests conspired to have Jesus killed, Jesus went to the cross of His own free will.
2. We ARE each Barrabbas. It’s ironic that Jesus was Barrabbas’ substitute, because Jesus is our substitute.
3. While many would like to blame the Jewish community of His day for condemning Jesus, the fact is that every day WE are the crowd yelling “Crucify Him” Every time you sin, whether it’s little white lie, stealing, treating someone badly or just ignoring the gift Christ has given you, you shout “Crucify Him.” How many times just today did you shout and not even know it?
4. One criminal hung on either side of Jesus and they represent us. The question is, are you the robber who recognized who Jesus was and was humbled in His presence or are you the man who questioned Jesus about whether He was really who He said He was.
5. The punishment that Jesus took was punishment that we deserved. The beating that He took was our beating, the cross that He hung on was our cross and the nails in His hands and His feet were our nails. ***

Pastor or Worship Leader: Jesus took your nail. It was your sin that finally put out the light of Christ. Tonight as a reminder of exactly what our sin cost Jesus we’re going to take our nails and put them in this candle. *(Hold up the Christ candle)* Some of you may remember this candle. For those of you who don’t recognize it, it’s the one we lit on Christmas Eve to represent the coming of Christ into this world. It’s the candle we call the “Christ Candle.” It’s white to remind us that Christ was perfect. Perfect so that He could be our substitute, the sacrifice for our sins. So tonight, as we sing these last few songs, I want you to take your nail and one at a time come forward and put your nail in this candle. Think about what in your life caused Christ to have to take your nail. *Have a few people prepared to come forward first. Then the rest of the congregation should follow*

Forever (Cimena)

Above All

We just closed the service with prayer and a quiet dismissal so that everyone would leave in a somewhat solemn mood.