

Dear friends,

Our worship on Good Friday, the day of Jesus' crucifixion, is deeply important to faithful Christians, but elements of it have been a concern for many of us for some time. We recently received a communication from Bishop Doug acknowledging the issues that have concerned us, authorizing use of alternative elements in the liturgy, and asking clergy in the Diocese to exercise care in our use of Good Friday texts. The liturgy you experience tomorrow will not be significantly changed, and many may not notice the new elements incorporated in it, but we wanted to share the thinking behind changes we are making.

Firstly, the Evangelist John's consistent negative depiction of "the Jews" has contributed directly to the history of Christian antisemitism, historically based on the reasoning that "the Jews killed Jesus". You've heard us both draw attention to this in our preaching. The phrase "the Jews" appears six times in the traditional translations of John's Passion account, appointed for use in the Good Friday liturgy, including both Jesus' own statement that his followers are "fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews", as well as the cries from "the Jews" to "crucify him!". (This passage is not the only problematic text: on the second Sunday of Easter every year, the "doubting Thomas" passage tells us that "the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews".)

Bishop Doug's recent letter said the following:

"...acts of violence in synagogues and threats of such violence are on the rise. It is more critical than ever to renounce the historic antisemitism that has endangered our Jewish sisters and brothers since the foundation of Christianity.... Repentance is not just sorrow for sin, but a willingness to change. It is time for us to change how we pray on the day in which Jesus showed us the depths of God's love."

In the Good Friday liturgy we will pray together tomorrow we will use a translation of John's Passion narrative that translates the Greek *hoi Iudaioi* as "the Judeans" or "the Judean leaders". In the Solemn Collects that follow the Passion Gospel, a Collect has been added for the Jewish people, and for relationships between Christians and Jews.

Two other subtle changes in language in this liturgy are worth noting (and celebrating). The Collect for those who suffer has been revised with first person language, to ensure that people who experience difficult conditions are not defined exclusively or primarily by those conditions. We'll pray, for example, for "those who are hungry and homeless", rather than for "the hungry" and "the homeless".

In addition, the final Solemn Collect in tomorrow's liturgy moves away from a theology that understands acceptance of the Gospel as a prerequisite for redemption. Instead of praying for "those who have not embraced the Gospel of Christ", we will pray for "those who have not embraced God's redemptive love", focusing our concern on our response to the work of God in the world, whether inside or outside the Church.

We are grateful that the Church continues to be responsive to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit, and that our leadership invites and encourages us to grow in the ways that we think and pray. We look forward to praying with you tomorrow and as we celebrate the risen Christ this Easter.

Faithfully yours,
Revs. Heather and Molly