

Experiencing the Tomb, Experiencing the Resurrection

*An Easter Program by Wanda Roth Amstutz
From Building the City of God: One Body, One Spirit
Mennonite Women*

Advance Preparation

You will need a song leader, soloist, pianist, and two worship leaders, one of whom is comfortable with anointing and offering a blessing. Have ready a vase or vases with multi-colored roses (enough for each member of the group) and oil for anointing.

Program

As a call to worship, read in unison (Isa. 43:1-3, adapted):

This is what the Lord says,
The one who formed you, the one who created you:
Fear not, for I have redeemed you.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.
When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.
I am the Lord your God.
You are precious in my sight, and I love you.

Sing HWB 25 “Jesus, stand among us” or HWB 7 “Here, O Lord, your servants gather.”

Leader 1: We are here to celebrate the most important event in the gospel story. This event is the reason the story of Jesus is even relevant to the world today. As Jesus was raised from the dead, God conquered darkness and death, and truth and light prevailed.

Leader 2: However, before this event could occur, Jesus needed to spend three days in the tomb. So while we are here to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, let us also first experience the tomb. For it is only in experiencing the darkness of the tomb that we experience the brilliance of the light.

Leader 1: Tomb experiences are those times in our lives when joy is hard to find. Tomb experiences are those times when we are tired, overwhelmed, sad. Tomb experiences are those times when we feel misunderstood, unappreciated, silenced. Tomb experiences are those times when we feel depressed, heavy hearted, hopeless. We have all experienced times of being in the tomb. Some may last for hours, some for days, weeks, even years.

Leader 2: Take heart. Jesus too was in the tomb. Jesus too experienced the darkness and heaviness of the closed-in vacuum of time and place.

Leader 1: As we slowly pray the following prayer together, allow yourself to feel the tomb. Allow yourself to remember the pain of your tomb experiences. During the prayer there will be time for a sung response.

(Before beginning the prayer the music leader directs the group in singing the selected song: HWB 348 “O Lord, hear my prayer” or Hymnal Subscription Service 917 “Don’t be afraid.” The song is repeated four times during the prayer. Allow prayerful moments of silence between sections.)

Prayer:

God, creator of heaven and earth. God, who breathes life into each us, come stay with us.
We recognize, God, that there are times in our lives when we are not “on top” of every situation.
We are tired, Lord. We spend so much time caring for others, we need to be cared for.
Care for us, Lord. *(Sung response.)*
God, there are times when we feel the darkness and the heaviness of the tomb.
It takes so much energy just to be. We are saddened by the burdens of life.
We need to be cared for. Care for us, Lord. *(Sung response.)*
God, there are times when we feel hopeless. Life is not what we expected.
Our children and spouses, our families and friends disappoint us.
We are saddened by the disappointments in life.
We need to be cared for. Care for us, Lord. *(Sung response.)*
God, there are times when we feel overwhelmed. We have so many responsibilities.
Sometimes it feels like everyone is tearing a piece of us away so that we are left with nothing.
We are saddened because we feel we are lost.
We need to be cared for. Care for us, Lord. *(Sung response.)*
Amen.

Leader 1: There must have been many times in Jesus’ life when he experienced the tomb. His trial and persecution and death were, of course, the ultimate tomb experiences. However, just as our opening scripture assures us, God does not forsake. God promises, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.” God did not forsake God’s son. Let’s listen to the resurrection story.

Read Mark 16:1-8.

Sing HWB 596 “And I will raise you up,” with a soloist singing the verses.

Leader 2: God did not forsake God’s son. God will not forsake us. The same God who raised Jesus from the dead is available to work in our lives. God still has the power to make resurrection happen. Even though we are not literally dead, we have experienced the tomb and are in need of resurrection.

Leader 1: God is a God of rebirth, of new beginnings, of resurrections. While this sounds good, the journey there is not always easy. The tomb, at times, can be overwhelming. Today we want to offer you a chance to receive a blessing through two different channels.

Leader 2: One is through anointing with oil. Anointing with oil is a tradition that goes back to the early church. It is not a magic potion, or an instant antidote to all our problems. It is, however, an opening of ourselves to God’s Spirit and God’s presence in our lives. You are invited to be anointed with oil as a symbol of your desire for resurrection in your own life, and of your desire for God’s presence as you journey from the tomb to light.

Leader 1: You are also invited to receive a rose as a symbol of rebirth and as a symbol of your own uniqueness as a beloved daughter of God. As the music begins please come forward to receive your rose. You are also welcome at that time to receive anointing with oil. *(The leader explains logistics of where to go to receive roses and to be anointed.)*

As group members come forward have a trio sing HWB 614 "In the bulb there is a flower" or have an instrumental solo. Alternatively have the group sing HWB 269 "Thine is the glory" or Hymnal Subscription Service 864 "The Lord is my light." The person giving the roses may say to each recipient, "May this rose be a symbol of God's great love for you." The person with the oil may say, "(Name), I anoint you with oil in the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. May God heal your body, mind, and spirit as you journey from tomb to life." Ask the group to stand for the benediction.

Leader 1: Once we were dry and brittle like leaves in November.

Group: But God is a God who replenishes.

Leader 2: Once we were tired and without hope.

Group: But God is a God of energy and life.

Leader 1: Once we were surrounded by darkness and death.

Group: But God is a God of resurrection and light!

Leader 2: God behind us, God before us,
God around us, God within us. Go in peace. Amen.