

## **Where Two or Three are Gathered**

### **Worship for Small Assemblies**

#### **Holy Week and Easter Day**

Welcome to Holy Week and Easter Day!

I am writing this on Ash Wednesday, the day that launches us into a special season of prayer, reflection, learning, and worship which will culminate in that very special week we label as 'Holy', and which includes The Three Days and Easter Sunday. We who are part of the great liturgical traditions of the Church (notably Lutheran, Anglican, and Roman Catholics, along with our Orthodox siblings) keep this week and these days in notable, time-honoured, and biblically warranted ways. While some would argue that it may not be THE most important week in our Christian year, it is, without argument, the most dramatic, colourful and I would suggest, sensual of our worship times. Unlike much of our weekly worship, which may have a certain degree of predictability and similarity, this week is one of deep variety and difference, appealing to our senses, our intellect, and our emotions.

It is a week about which we know a great deal from the witness of scripture; it is a week whose geographic shape is circular: it both begins and ends in Jerusalem, but in starkly different ways. It begins and ends in great triumph, but traverses darkness, death, self-giving, love, agony and isolation in its progression. It provides a rich tapestry of readings, images, and actions in which all can participate. How sorry we all might feel for those who come to worship only on The Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday) and then again on Easter Day, missing all the good bits in between. The week is often known as *the way of the cross* - reflected in the Prayer of the Day on The Sunday of the Passion.

May it be a week for us all that is engrossing, involving, deeply moving, and equally inspiring and comforting. Enjoy this most holy of times!

#### **Planning:**

Many communities will have insufficient resources to do *all* the services which one might wish; this is a grand opportunity to reach out to others - Christian communities of different denominations and sizes - to mark these days together in prayer, singing, and praise.

Even if keeping the three days in all their fullness is not possible, encourage your leaders to gather together for a meal on Thursday, possibly including the washing of

feet; a time to read together John's great Passion on Good Friday; and perhaps even a gathering in the darkness of Saturday night to light a fire and follow that light into a darkened church. The resources needed can be simple and need only involve what are, oftentimes, easily at hand.

Worship leaders and planners are encouraged to consult *Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)*, pp.247-270 (in the grey *Leaders' Desk Edition*, pp. 611-653) for helpful advice and scriptural citations, litanies, etc.

## **Sunday of the Passion (also known as 'Palm Sunday')**

**March 24, 2024**

**Liturgical Colour: Red**

*Notes: Depending on how you count, this is the **last** day of Lent (it is the 40th day since Ash Wednesday). Holy Week thus becomes its own distinctive piece of the liturgical calendar.\*\* (see note)*

*This day includes the story of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem in which he was met by the people shouting Hosanna and spreading palm branches in his way. Often, Palm crosses are blessed and distributed to the gathered people; the Gospel passage for the day this year includes the Passion according to Mark.*

*While some contemporary scholars and liturgists are questioning the 'bulk' of this service - the distribution of the palms and the reading of the passion, and the celebration of the eucharist, it really does all work well and provides the dramatic reality of Jesus triumph and then the prefiguring of what is to come as the week unfolds. To put it in terms of colour, the day begins in a great splash of bright red and gold, and ends in a much more muted crimson or magenta.*

**Readings:**

**Gospel of the Palms: Mark 11.1-11**

**Blessing of Palms:**

*We praise you, O God,  
for redeeming the world through our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Today, he entered the holy city in triumph  
and was proclaimed messiah and king  
by those who spread garments and branches along his way.  
Bless these branches and those who carry them.  
Grant us grace to follow our Lord in the way of the cross,  
so that, joined to his death and resurrection,  
we enter into life with you;*

*through the same Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever.*

**Readings for the Eucharist:**

**Isaiah 50.4-9a**

**Psalm 31.9-16**

**Philippians 2.5-11**

**Mark 15.1-47**

**Prayer of the Day:**

*O God of mercy and might,  
In the mystery of the passion of your Son  
you offer your infinite life to the world.  
Gather us around the cross of Christ,  
and preserve us until the resurrection,  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever.*

**Hymns/Songs:**

***Palm Procession:***

**All Glory, Laud, and Honour ELW 344**

**Ride on, Ride on in Majesty ELW 340**

**Pave the Way with Branches ACS 928**

***Eucharist:***

**My Song is Love Unknown ELW 343**

**O sacred head, now wounded ELW 351/352**

**Were you there ELW 353**

**Go to dark Gethsemane ELW 347**

**Preaching/Reflecting:**

- How has our Lenten journey prepared us for this walk this week?
- How easy it is for us all to shout our exultant Hosannas and then spin on a dime and shout 'Crucify him'...
- How will we wait and watch and pray with Jesus this week?

## **Holy (Maundy) Thursday**

*The term 'maundy' comes from the Latin 'mandatum' (commandment) referring to the 'new commandment' given to his disciples by Jesus to love one another in this day's Gospel reading.*

**Liturgical Colour: White**

### **Readings:**

**Exodus 12.1-14**

**Psalm 116.1-2,12-19**

**1 Corinthians 11.23-26**

**John 13.1-17,31b-35**

### **Prayer of the Day:**

*Holy God, source of all love,  
on the night of his betrayal,  
Jesus gave us a new commandment,  
to love one another  
As he loves us.  
Write this commandment  
in our hearts, and give us  
the will to serve others  
as he was servant of all,  
your Son, Jesus Christ,  
our Saviour and Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever.*

### **Songs/Hymns:**

**Healer of Our Every Ill ELW 612**

**Where Charity and Love Prevail ELW 359**

**Ubi caritas ELW 642**

**God is Love ACS 1041**

### **Preaching/Reflecting:**

- What does the New Commandment mean in 2024 for us? For the world?

- We all know that the Eucharist is the 'greatest' feast of the church. How does the story of its institution resonate with us today?
- There is an incredible intimacy in the washing of feet - it speaks to servanthood and of doing to others as we wish could be done to us.

*Note: If Foot-washing is to be included, invite everyone to have their feet washed, and have members of the congregation wash as well as 'be washed'.*

*Invitation to Foot-washing (if desired)*

***On this night we have heard our Lord's commandment to love one another as he has loved us. We who receive God's love in Jesus Christ are called to love one another, to be servants to each other as Jesus became our servant. Our commitment to this loving service is signified in the washing of feet, following the example our Lord gave us on the night before his death.***

*Another idea: Instead of one sermon, try three very short reflections, perhaps by different people, one on the Washing of Feet, one on the New Commandment, and one on the Institution of the Lord's Supper (contained in this night's epistle; it is not mentioned in the Gospel of John.)*

**Note: In some communities, it may be the practice to remove hangings, banners, silver crosses, etc from the church/sanctuary at the conclusion of Maundy Thursday liturgy so that, on Good Friday, the church is 'stripped' of all adornments.**

## **Good Friday**

**Liturgical Colour: Black, or None**

**Readings:**

**Isaiah 52.13-53.12**

**Psalm 22**

**Hebrews 10.16-25**

**John 18.1-19.42**

**Hymns/Songs:**

**O Sacred Head, now Wounded ELW 352/352**

**When I Survey the Wondrous Cross ELW 803**

**They crucified my Lord ELW 350**  
**Sing My Tongue ELW 355/356**  
**Holy God ELW 637**

*The Good Friday rite (please see notes, ELW, p. 262) is one of readings, prayers, and meditation. The Passion according to John (gospel reading) is a key part of this rite, as are solemn prayers for the Church and the world. While an opportunity for preaching, the service can also stand quite well on the foundation of the readings, the Passion, the prayers, and the Solemn Reproaches (below).*

**The Solemn Reproaches (P - Presider; C - Congregation; R - Reader, Presider, or Cantor)**

P. We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C. By your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.**

P. May God be merciful to us and bless us, show us the light of his countenance, and come to us.

**C. Let your ways be known upon the earth, your saving health among all nations.**

P. Let all the people praise you, O God; let all the people praise you.

**C. We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you. By your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.**

***Period of Silence***

*R. O my people, O my church, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me! I led you out of slavery into freedom, and delivered you through the waters of rebirth, but you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.*

**C. Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

*R. Forty years I led you through the desert, feeding you with manna on the way; I saved you from the time of trial and gave you my body, the bread of heaven, but you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.*

**C. Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

*R. I led you on your way in a pillar of cloud and fire, but you led me to the judgment hall of Pilate; I guided you with the light of the Holy Spirit, but you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.*

**C. Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.**

*R. I planted you as my fairest vine, but you have brought forth bitter fruit; I made you branches of the vine and never left your side, but you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.*

***C. Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.***

*R. O my people, O my church, what more could I have done for you? Answer me! I poured out saving water from the rock, but you gave me vinegar to drink; I poured out my life and gave you the new covenant in my blood, but you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.*

***C. Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.***

### ***Period of Silence***

*R. O my people, O my church, what more could I have done for you? Answer me! I gave you a royal sceptre, but you gave me a crown of thorns; I gave you the kingdom and crowned you with eternal life, but you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.*

***C. Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.***

*R. I struck down your enemies, but you struck my head with a reed; I gave you my peace, but you draw the sword in my name, and you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.*

***C Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.***

*R. I opened the waters to lead you to the promised land, but you opened my side with a spear; I washed your feet as a sign of my love, but you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.*

***C. Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.***

*R. O my people, O my church, what more could I have done for you? Answer me! I lifted you up to the heights, but you lifted me high on a cross; I raised you from death and prepared for you the tree of life, but you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.*

***C. Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.***

*R. I grafted you into my people Israel, but you made them scapegoats for your own guilt, and you have prepared a cross for your Saviour.*

***C. Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.***

*R. I came to you in the least of your brothers and sisters, but I was hungry and you gave me no food, thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me, and you*

*have prepared a cross for your Saviour.*

***C. Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy on us.***

***Period of Silence***

Hymn "Ah, Holy Jesus" ELW 349

**CLOSING RITE**

***The people stand***

P. We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you.

**C. By your holy cross, you have redeemed the world.**

P. If we have died with him, we shall also live with him.

**C. If we endure, we shall also reign with him.**

P. Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, we pray to set your passion, cross and death between your judgment and our souls, now and in the hour of our death. Give mercy and grace to the living; pardon and rest to the dead; to your Holy Church peace and concord; and to us sinners everlasting life and glory; for with the Father and the Holy Spirit, you live and reign, one God, now and forever.

**C. Amen**

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**Preaching/Reflecting for Good Friday (if desired):**

- Why is this day called 'Good'?
- In what ways, if at all, do we identify with the 'characters' - Peter, Pilate, the soldiers, the women?
- The language of John's Gospel has always been contentious - his repeated use of 'the Jews', for example. How do we, in 2024, with the current realities in the Holy Land, redeem our language and our apparent anti-semitism with the good news for all people today? Can we?
- Where is Easter in this Good Friday?

**The Great Vigil of Easter**



Some communities will have the tradition of gathering for a Vigil on Easter Eve, often with other congregations and/or denominations. It is a night to dramatically light the New Fire and to light the Paschal candle to illuminate a darkened world (and church).

Often the Candle is processed into the church, readings of salvation history are spoken, sometimes Baptism is celebrated (as was the immutable case in the very early church), and Communion may be celebrated (the 'first' communion of Easter.)

This is clearly not the pattern for many communities, but some may wish to explore possibilities. A gala 'Resurrection Party' is often a great way to conclude the service. It is best to start in the dark, so that the light really does 'dispel the darkness'.

Local communities are strongly encouraged to refer to ELW pp. 266 ff. for suggestions and a 'shape' of the service. Please feel free to contact the writer if more information or advice is desired. (Contact info: [dean.peter.wall@gmail.com](mailto:dean.peter.wall@gmail.com); 905-317-0546)

## **The Day of Resurrection - Easter Sunday**

*(Note: Easter is a season - it does not end today, Hence, calling today 'Easter Day' is most appropriate, since we will call the next several Sundays 'Easter' as well).*

### **Liturgical Colour: White or Gold**

*(Pull out all the stops - as many flowers as you can manage, use the best silver; lots of candles, banners, etc. Make this a real 'gala' Sunday!)*

### **Readings:**

**Isaiah 25.6-9**

**Psalm 118.1-2,14-24**

**Acts 10.34-43**

**Mark 16.1-8**

### **Prayer of the Day:**

*God of mercy,  
we no longer look for Jesus among the dead,  
for he is alive and has become the Lord of life.  
Increase in our minds and hearts  
the risen life we share with Christ  
and help us to grow as your people  
toward the fulness of eternal life with you,  
through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,*

*One God, now and forever. **Amen.***

**Liturgical Notes:** This day is, after all, as one ancient hymn puts it, 'The Queen of seasons bright!' It is a day of great rejoicing; use hymns that are meaningful, well-known (there might be visitors) and joyous. Congregations should consider using the Thanksgiving for Baptism at the beginning of the liturgy. Easter is *the* season of baptism, after all. Good forms are available in ELW, p. 97 and in ACS, p. 10.

Similarly, it is a time for active participation by the children of the congregation - an Easter pageant or story, for example. Easter crafts can be incorporated into the decor and the liturgy.

**Hymns/Songs:**

**Jesus Christ is Risen Today ELW 365**

**Hail, Thee, Festival Day ELW 364**

**The Strife is O'er ELW 366**

**The Day of Resurrection ELW 361**

**Christ is Risen! Alleluia! ELW 382**

**Good Christian Friends, Rejoice and Sing ELW 385**

**Day of delight and beauty unbounded ACS 933**

**Preaching/Reflecting:**

- What does 'resurrection' mean in our context, in 2024?
- How do we live authentically as 'Easter' people?
- What in our lives needs 'the stone rolled away'?
- Easter is a season that lasts for 50 days, until Pentecost.  
What shall we do together to make it a truly meaningful season?

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**\*\*Counting Days** - Other authorities say that Sundays in Lent are not, specifically, 'lenten days'. Using that lens, Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes on Holy Saturday - 40 days. Such are the wonders of Christian counting!!!