



PALM SUNDAY

VESPER

Holy Week 2020

EASTER

VIGIL

SAT 4/11

11:45PM

WESLEY AT UVA

wesleyatuva.org

Holy Week in 2020

Pastors have been wondering for weeks now about what to do for Easter this year. Some have wondered about putting off Easter observances, waiting to celebrate until we have made it through the physical isolation of the current pandemic crisis. They wonder: How can we “have Easter” when nothing feels celebratory right now? Can’t we wait and have a really big Easter party later?

I am encouraging everyone to lean into our liturgical year, marking the days as we normally do, even though nothing is normal right now. I am not suggesting that we have phantom palm processions with only one person in the parade. I am suggesting that—even if everything about Easter and our worship looks different than usual—Easter always comes. It’s not up to us. Easter always means that love conquers death and that God holds the end of the story, even now.

I admit that, more years than not, I have not been suffering in synch with the stories of Holy Week. This is part of why we worship together in the first place and why we remember together the full story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We gather in worship to experience the story of God’s love and redemption of the whole world. We do it whether we “feel” we need redemption on a particular day or not. We do it whether we think we are worthy of God’s love and grace or not. Our personal and communal circumstances do not always “match” the story we are living with and remembering at any one point in the Christian liturgical year. Our personal circumstances don’t always “match” the other people (normally) sitting in the pews with us. That’s ok. Be where you are and let the readings and worship and prayers of your sisters and brothers undergird you.

Instead of wishing this Holy Week were “normal” or wishing it away or indulging in the desire to skip Easter until the circumstances “match” as we think they should—instead of all that, *bring* your worry, vigilance, anxiety, feelings of loss and grief, intercessory prayers for the essential workers and those who are sick...Bring it all to every step on this Holy Week’s road. Don’t try to disentangle yourself from the precise incarnational spot we are in right now—look for Jesus in the midst, even now.

Deep suffering may be easier for you to access than it sometimes is at Easter. It feels that way to me. So, what does the story of Jesus show us about suffering? Our own suffering right now? Redemption? Hope?

Leave room this week to listen or simply to rest with God. Let your own story comeingle with the gospel and see where God takes you. Blessings on the road ahead.

Rev. Deborah Lewis
Wesley Foundation at UVA, April 2020

Solace Blessing
By Jan Richardson

That's it.
That's all this blessing
knows how to do:

Shine your shoes.
Fill your refrigerator.
Water your plants.
Make some soup.

All the things
you cannot think
to do yourself
when the world
has come apart,
when nothing
will be normal
again.

Somehow
this blessing knows
precisely what you need,
even before
you know.

It sees what will bring
the deepest solace
for you.
It senses what will offer
the kindest grace.

And so it will step
with such quietness
into the ordinary moments
where the absence
is the deepest.

It will enter
with such tenderness
into the hours
where the sorrow
is most keen.

You do not even
have to ask.

Just leave it open—
your door,
your heart,
your day
in every aching moment
it holds.

See what solace
spills through the gaps
your sorrow has torn.

See what comfort
comes to visit,
holding out its gifts
in each compassionate hand.

(from *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*
© Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com)

Palm Sunday

Prayer (adapted from Martha Spong's *Reflectionary*)

Hear us shout together,
even though we are apart:

Hosanna!

Blessed is the one
who comes
in the name of the Lord!

Bless us today
as you blessed the world long ago.
In the name of Jesus,
Son of David, we pray.
Amen.

Scripture

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Reflect

Where do you see signs of God's steadfast love? No matter how big or small the signs seem, name them and give thanks.

Prayer

Hosanna! I know I need saving and I know I cannot save myself. But there is so much I do not know right now. Even as I enter again into these familiar Holy Week stories, I do not know how this day or week will end. I do not know what twists, turns, or bad news will come my way. I do not always look in the right direction for hope. You are the Light and the Hope of the world. Hosanna! Save me!

**Please join us for Palm Sunday Vespers today at 5pm today:*

<https://zoom.us/j/809485588?pwd=d1ZWQlNFOXBiYmg0WWp3eEtIWTFZUT09>

Monday

Call to Confession (adapted from *Touch Holiness*)

Let us confess before God our tendency, like the Jerusalem crowds, to profess our faith in moments of enthusiasm and deny our faith in moments of stress:

O God, I sing and praise you, happy of heart and strong of spirit, when I am among others who praise you too. But in times of stress, I seek scapegoats to be targets for my anger. I betray those I love and who have loved me and I turn against you, too busy to seek you, too selfish to obey you. Your compassion is without bounds, O God, for you forgive me again and again. You restore me to a right spirit and bring me to worship you again. God of steadfast love, teach me how to be steadfast; through Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

Scripture

Isaiah 50: 4-9a

Listen

During the pandemic crisis, cellist Yo-Yo Ma is offering short, simple recordings called “Songs of Comfort.” Allow yourself to receive this gift and whatever comfort may come through listening: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrBOKHfvNSY>

Prayer

Thank you, Artist of all that is, for the gift of music. Please keep my heart open and spacious in these days. Give me room to grieve and feel my losses. Give me courage to walk with Jesus through the losses and passion we remember this week. Keep me close to the Comforter when despair is also so close. Amen.

Tuesday

Prayer (UMC Book of Worship #347)

Holy and compassionate God,
your dear Son went not up to joy before he suffered pain,
and entered not into glory before he was crucified.
Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,
may find it the way of life and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son, our Savior. Amen.

Scripture

Psalm 31: 1-16

"Blessing in the Chaos" (from *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*, © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com)

To all that is chaotic
in you,
let there come silence.

Let there be
a calming
of the clamoring,
a stilling
of the voices that
have laid their claim
on you,
that have made their
home in you,

that go with you
even to the
holy places
but will not
let you rest,
will not let you
hear your life
with wholeness
or feel the grace
that fashioned you.

Let what distracts you

cease.
Let what divides you
cease.
Let there come an end
to what diminishes
and demeans,
and let depart
all that keeps you
in its cage.

Let there be
an opening
into the quiet
that lies beneath
the chaos,
where you find
the peace
you did not think
possible
and see what shimmers
within the storm.

Prayer (Ps 31:14-15)
I trust in you, O Lord;
I say, "You are my God."
My times are in your hand. Amen.

Wednesday

Prayer (UMC *Book of Worship* #348)

Most merciful God,
your blessed Son, our Savior, was betrayed, whipped, and his face spat upon.
Grant us grace to endure the sufferings of the present time,
to overcome all that seeks to overwhelm us,
confident of the glory that shall yet be revealed;
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

Scripture

John 13: 31-35

Invitation to Service

Tomorrow's scripture is the story of Jesus humbling himself to serve his friends, by kneeling to wash their feet. As you remember, Peter is very uncomfortable with Jesus serving him like this, and I suspect the other disciples were also squirming with the strange intimacy of this loving act. Today's scripture comes after that story. Driving the point home, Jesus says, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another" (v.34).

Consider today as your "prep day" for Holy Thursday. How can you practice humility and service—loving your neighbors—even and especially in this strange time? Perhaps you can surprise someone in your family/household by overturning what's expected, serving them instead of being served? Perhaps you can offer comfort to someone who usually comforts you? Spend some time today preparing your gift or act of love. Here are a few ideas:

- Record a video for a grandparent or teacher.
- Hand-write a note of thanks, comfort, or appreciation for someone.
- Bake something to give to a neighbor.
- Offer to pick up groceries for a neighbor or church member who can't go themselves.
- Offer to play online games with young kids (nieces, cousins, neighbors, church members...) to give their parents a break.
- Contact the Red Cross. Make an appointment to give blood.

Prayer

I recognize your voice, Shepherd, calling my name. I hear you over the din and through the eerie quiet. I hear you. Show me how to love my neighbors now. Show me how to live and serve with humility. We call it "distant" but I trust we can love this way, too. Make these very-well-washed hands of mine tools you can use for love. In the name of the One who bent to wash the feet of others, I pray. Amen.

Holy Thursday

Prayer (UMC *Book of Worship* #349)

O God, by the example of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ,
you taught us the greatness of true humility,
and call us to watch with him in his passion.
Give us grace to serve one another in all lowliness,
and to enter into the fellowship of his suffering;
in his name and for his sake. Amen.

Scripture

John 13:1-30

Service & Reflection

Make time today to deliver your gift to your neighbor, if you didn't do so yesterday.

What does this act of loving your neighbor show you about God's love for you?
What does it show you about what you have to offer, even in a time of limits?
What other shapes can love take in your life right now?
How can you stay awake and attuned to the needs of your neighbors and the gifts you
have to offer in service and humility?

"Blessing for Staying Awake" (from *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*, © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com)

Even in slumber,
even in dreaming,
even in sorrow,
even in pain:

awake, awake,
awake my soul
to the One who keeps vigil
at all times for you.
Amen.

Good Friday

Prayer (from *Touch Holiness*)

A cradle and a cross
And between these—a life
Bethlehem and Jerusalem
A birth and a death
One “of sorrows”
Who often wept
One of joy who also kept
Sensitivity and compassion
Alive and real
Today let us feel
The surge of that life
The beauty of that love
The power of that cross. Amen.

Scripture

Psalm 22

John 18:1-27

Prayer (Ps 22:11)

Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.
Amen.

**Please join us for Good Friday worship at 12 noon today:*

<https://zoom.us/j/639448590?pwd=aENZMHhvZzVQOHBwYTlsa0ZPNdIxdz09>

Holy Saturday

Breathe (from "In the Breath, Another Breathing," *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief*, © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com)

Let it be
that on this day
we will expect
no more of ourselves
than to keep
breathing
with the bewildered
cadence
of lungs that will not
give up the ghost.

Let it be
we will
still ourselves
enough to hear
what may yet
come to echo:
as if in the breath,
another breathing;
as if in the heartbeat,
another heart.

Let it be
we will expect
little but
the beating of
our heart,
stubborn in
its repeating rhythm
that will not
cease to sound.

Let it be
we will not
try to fathom
what comes
to meet us
in the stillness
but simply open
to the approach
of a mystery
we hardly dared
to dream.

Listen

Keep breathing. Rest in the space and the emptiness of this day.

Listen: <https://www.facebook.com/YoYoMa/videos/2240652499574323/>

Pray

Crucified Savior, I admit that the spaces between things are easy to fill. With chatter or busy-ness or any kind of distraction. The space of this day is easier to rush through, anticipating tomorrow. Keep me waiting, breathing, patiently attentive to each moment. Meet me in these moments and in my struggle to follow where you go. Amen.

****Please join us for *Easter Vigil* worship at 11:45pm tonight:**

<https://zoom.us/j/905609852?pwd=WjlkMk92cnZsUE56YXFPSFRJNFZlQT09>

****Please join us for *Easter Vigil* worship at 11:45pm *Saturday night*:**
<https://zoom.us/j/905609852?pwd=WjlkMk92cnZsUE56YXFPSFRJNFZlQT09>

Easter Sunday

Easter Proclamation

Love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
Many waters cannot quench love.

Christ the Lord is risen.
Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Song (from “Christ the Lord is Risen Today,” UMH #302)

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

Love’s redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!
Christ has opened paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting, Alleluia!
Once he died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where’s thy victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted head, Alleluia!
Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

Scripture

Matthew 28:1-10

Reflection

It's curious that Matthew notes the earthquake happens when the angel rolls the stone away for the Marys to peer into the tomb, rather than at the moment of the resurrection itself (v. 2). The angel underscores that the "big event" has already transpired, "He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said" (v. 6). In Mark's account of Easter morning, the women head to the tomb carrying burial spices (Mark 16). They come, grieving, looking to tend the dead.

The first testimony of Easter, heralded by an earthquake, is absence. Jesus is not where they laid him. They come looking for death and even that's not there. Expectations, like the stone, are overturned, pushed aside, revealing something no one knew to look for.

This year, as we greet this Easter dawn and celebrate this day in our separate spaces, may we be open to what we didn't expect or dare hope for. Look down: are you still holding burial spices? Look up: this is a party!

Matthew tells us that it is when the Marys leave the tomb "with fear and great joy," running to share the news with the other disciples, that the resurrected Jesus meets them (vv.8-9). Mingling Mark's and Matthew's gospels, I imagine they drop the burial spices when they turn away from the tomb to run back home, so they meet Jesus with empty hands. Let go: death no longer has a hold on you.

Whatever you have been expecting to encounter today, be prepared to meet the risen Christ with empty hands. Allow yourself to turn away from death and towards the One who has conquered death. Be open to surprise, earthquakes, and loud absence.

Easter intrudes into the very real mess, sorrow, anxiety, and pasta-oatmeal-rice-bean-dinners of our sequestered lives to pronounce the risen Christ, alive, with us, going before us in all things. The risen Christ proclaims that there is nowhere we can go, no sorrow or separation so deep, that God-in-Christ has not already been there, hallowing it before we arrive. Even the place we find ourselves today.

Death is never the last word. Love is. Thanks be to God!

Blessing

Go in peace to love and serve the Risen Lord. Alleluia! Alleluia!