

**Holy Week At-Home Worship Guide**  
**Holy Week 2020**  
**First United Methodist Church of Many, LA**

**Introduction:**

We are challenged this week to maintain necessary “social distancing” to avoid the spread of COVID-19, but we need not be spiritually distant from God or from one another. There are events that we normally anticipate with joy and enthusiasm, that we will not be able to enjoy together in our traditional way. For most of us the hardest traditions to lose are the ones that affect our worship during this holiest of weeks. With that in mind, I have created these guides and outlines for individuals and families to use at home this week as we prepare ourselves for Resurrection Sunday. I hope you find them meaningful.

Pastor Gloria

**Palm Sunday (April 5, 2020)**

**Palms and Festivals**

Our scripture text for worship today is **Matthew 21:1-11**. Read it now from your favorite translation of the Bible. If there are children of reading age in the family, you might allow them to read it aloud.

Jesus knew exactly what he faced as he traveled to Jerusalem for the joyful celebration of the Passover festival. This was a week-long festival, probably a lot like our festivals today. There was partying in the streets, food, games, and friends as well as worship that remembered how God brought the Hebrew people out of Egypt. (You can read that story in **Exodus 12.**) While Jesus enjoyed the festival, he knew that he faced the cross on Friday.

Pretend for a moment that you don’t know what the week holds. Can you recall a festival that you attended in recent months or years? The Zwolle Tamale Festival, Mardi Gras, the Strawberry Festival in Ponchatoula, the Railroad Festival in DeQuincy, or the Pecan Festival in Colfax come to my mind. The Pecan Festival has brought as many as 100,000 people to that little town in a single weekend. There is food, craft booths, pecans of every variety, music, concerts, contests, and a weekend long party. The festival begins, however, with a local pastor offering a prayer asking God to bless the pecan harvest. When it was my turn to be that pastor, I explained that the festivals of the Old Testament can remind us that our festivals can be expressions of gratitude to God for blessing us with the product that we celebrate. Can you draw a parallel between what Passover celebrated and what Jesus was about to do for humankind?

What did the festival you attended celebrate? Can you see how a festival can encourage us to worship God? Recall together what you loved/didn’t love about the festival you are remembering. And say a prayer thanking Jesus for entering Jerusalem on that Sunday so long ago, even though he knew what he faced.

**Thank you, Lord Jesus, for accepting your followers’ weaknesses and lack of understanding. Guide us through this Holy Week to a new and richer understanding of your gifts to us. Amen.**

**Now...go outside, wave something green, and shout, “Hosanna!”**

**Monday, April 6, 2020**

**Read Matthew 21:12-17**

**Worship For Financial Gain?**

Do you ever get frustrated when you encounter people who don't understand proper use of the church building as you understand it? We're all human and we don't all agree on what is appropriate in God's House. We all can be right sometimes and wrong at other times. Maybe we're all right at different times.

Can you name something you've seen happen in your church that you didn't think was appropriate? How did it make you feel? Were you disappointed...hurt...angry?

Jesus went directly from the Palm Sunday processional to the temple where a larger-than-usual crowd was in a festival mood, buying and selling animals for sacrifice in worship. Read that again. Large crowd. Buying and selling. In the temple. Animals for an act of WORSHIP. It seems to me that the people were caught up in festivities and forgot what was at the heart of worship. Worship is not a for-profit activity. Churches still are non-profit and not subject to the laws that govern for-profit business.

Jesus was angered by the activities that he saw in His Father's House. A worship center had morphed into a business, even though the money-makers thought they were providing a service for worshipers. That must have been confusing for a lot of people.

You might like to create a space in your home for a simple altar that can be your worship space during our stay-at-home time. You only need a small space. A candle can represent the light of Christ. A cross is a nice symbol for a Christian altar. You might place your Bible there. If you have cloth to drape the space, remember that purple is the color we use until Friday when black is appropriate. We use white for Easter Sunday and the season of Easter that follows. You may have other symbols to add to your altar. Let this activity today remind you that some spaces are set aside and consecrated to God as special worship spaces, and that we should consider some uses of that space to be inappropriate uses.

**Thank you, Heavenly Father, for allowing Jesus to show us his humanity as well as his moment of anger. May we learn to define appropriate and inappropriate use of your House. Amen.**

**Tuesday, April 7, 2020**

**Teaching His Way to the Cross**

**Read Matthew Chapters 22-25. Focus on the Parable of the Wedding Feast in 22:1-14**

During the first few days of the week, Jesus was teaching the people. They still didn't realize what was going to happen, but Jesus knew that his time to teach was short and he wanted to teach as much as he could in that short time. These chapters contain several of Jesus' teaching parables, and they all are filled with truths worth our attention.

The story of the wedding party seems simple. Those who were invited to the elaborate and expensive feast to celebrate the son's wedding chose to ignore the invitation. Apparently, the party wasn't enticing to those who thought they already had plenty of entertainment and rich food. The host, then invited everyone else to the feast. He sent servants to invite everyone they could find. The "everyone elses" came in droves. I can imagine people who were not accustomed to attending elaborate parties hosted by wealthy people looking in their closets for something they considered good enough to wear. The host spotted someone in the

room who wasn't dressed very well, and he asked, "How did you get in here?" The guest was told that he wasn't welcome after all and was removed from the party.

What do you suppose it means? We all like to feel that we look like we belong in certain circles. We shop for new dresses and suits when we receive special invitations. But do you suppose this was about more than looks?

Jesus tells us in the beginning of the story that the story is about the Kingdom of Heaven. It seems that the first group of invited guests weren't convinced that they needed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Maybe they thought their wealth was enough. Maybe they were so comfortable they didn't think they needed God.

If there is a child present, ask if they can remember a time when they didn't know how to act in a situation even though they had the "right" clothes. Maybe the adults can remember a similar experience. Which fork do I use? I need to remember to thank the host. I must use my very best manners!

Before I was ordained, Bishop Hutchinson took the ordinands to lunch at the Baton Rouge City Club. The tablecloths are white. The dishes are fine china. The silverware is sterling. The glasses are crystal. The table settings are formal. The waiters use well practiced etiquette. I was aware that the Bishop would note anyone who didn't seem comfortable in that setting, that it could have career implications, and I was grateful for having been taught well. Good manners and proper table manners had been a staple at our kitchen table, so the behavior was internalized. I was able to be my comfortable self at lunch with my Bishop.

Do you suppose the wedding feast guest's clothing revealed something about what his heart held? I don't think that his clothing was what really troubled the host; it was his heart that wasn't suitable for the Kingdom of God. He couldn't enter the Kingdom of God unless he had God in his heart. The Kingdom is for all, but our hearts must be right.

Think about and/or discuss with your family what it means to have God in your heart this Easter.

**Prod us, O God, to nurture your place in our hearts and lives. Remind us that looks aren't everything, but that what is on the inside matters a great deal. Amen.**

**Wednesday, April 8, 2020**

**The Plot**

**Read Matthew 26:1-16**

This part of the story leading to Easter appears to be the beginning of the end. Jesus has known all along what his fate would be on Friday, though his followers seemed to miss every clue that he offered. We don't know whether the woman who poured the perfume over his feet and wiped his feet with her hair understood, but Jesus recognized the act to be preparation for the placement of his body in the tomb. When his disciples complained about the "waste" of money and good perfume, he even said that she was preparing his body for burial. Perfume was used in this way in those days.

For Judas Iscariot, the one who would betray Jesus, this was his cue to act. He went to the Jewish chief priest and made his offer to turn over Jesus for a fee. 30 pieces of silver was the agreed upon price of betrayal. The plan was in motion.

We could focus on any number of aspects of this part of the story. Judas Iscariot's betrayal is certainly a vital part of the plot and a part that breaks our hearts. We could focus on the disciples' desire to give to the poor, and whether they were honest about that desire. I would rather focus on the woman's act of love. Whether she understood her own action is unclear. Her love for Jesus is very clear.

The woman made a great sacrifice of worldly wealth to anoint Jesus. Her perfume was the equivalent of the most expensive perfume a woman can purchase today. She didn't use a few drops either! She poured what to us would be thousands of dollars' worth, an entire bottle, of this perfume over Jesus' feet before wiping his feet with her hair. The aroma was just as strong as when your toddler dropped and broke a new bottle of your perfume on the bedroom rug! For your toddler it was an accident. For this woman, it was an act of overwhelming and sacrificial love for the One who yet lived – before he sacrificed his life for her on the cross.

Our question today is: What are you and I sacrificing? Your answer is likely your desire and need to gather your extended family and friends in one place and physically touch one another during this time of social distancing and orders to stay at home. How does your compliance to our social distancing directive demonstrate your love for Jesus? For your neighbors? For all the most vulnerable people in your community? Are their lives and yours worth the sacrifice? Jesus gave his life because our lives are worth it. Let us show our love for Jesus and other people by making this important sacrifice.

**On this Wednesday of Holy Week, Heavenly Father, remind us that the sacrifice we are asked to make to save lives from COVID-19 pales in comparison to your sacrifice for us. Give us strength of will and character to be faithful to the task. Amen.**

**Maundy Thursday, April 9, 2020  
Read Matthew 26:17-30**

**Betrayal and Arrest**

Jesus gathered his disciples in the Upper Room where they shared the traditional Passover meal that commemorated the way in which God brought the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt. (Exodus 12) This was the last meal Jesus shared with them before his physical death. At the end of that meal he served them what Christians call Holy Communion or The Last Supper.

We will not consecrate bread and grape juice for Communion tonight but will share in a Wesleyan Love Feast around your family's dinner table. The meal may be as simple or as elaborate as your culinary skills and desires inspire. If you choose to share this experience with those who are staying at home with you, or alone if you live alone, you will experience a deeply meaningful worship experience. You are invited to follow the guide that follows.

### **Wesleyan Love Feast**

The Love Feast, or Agape Meal, has been observed for centuries as a worshipful way to recall some of the meals that Jesus shared during his ministry. This is not a sacrament; the food is not consecrated, and we do not practice this worship as a means of grace. It is, however, deeply

meaningful worship. This abbreviated and simple guide will help you and your family to experience Maundy Thursday away from the walls of the church. I hope that you will do so.

At the table before the meal:

**Opening Chorus** (sing or recite the words) **Blest Be The Tie That Binds**

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.

**Prayers** Share joys and concerns and pray together.

**Blessing** (sung to tune of the Doxology) **Wesleyan Table Blessing**

Be present at our table, Lord;  
Be here and everywhere adored.  
Thy creatures bless and grant that we  
May feast in paradise with Thee. Amen.

**Recite together:** Father of earth and heaven, thy hungry children feed,  
Thy grace be to our spirits given, that true immortal bread.  
Grant us and all our race in Jesus Christ to prove  
The sweetness of thy pardoning grace, the manna of thy love.

**Read John 6:25-35**

**Share and Eat the Meal**

**After the Meal Sing again the 1<sup>st</sup> verse of Blest Be The Tie That Binds as Benediction**

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.

Later in the evening, read the rest of the story of the night Jesus was arrested. It is found in Matthew 26:31-56.

**Thank you, Lord, for reminding us of your great love. Lead us to love others as you love us. Amen.**

**Good Friday, April 10, 2020**

**The Painful Truth**

**Read Matthew 27:1-61** (It's long but important today.)

I find it ironic that we label today "Good" Friday. I guess we can't use the day-after-Thanksgiving shopping label; it would seem more appropriate to call today "Black" Friday. While we understand that today is good for us, it certainly was horrific for Jesus. He sacrificed his life in the most humiliating and painful way imaginable. He hung naked on a cross until he was too weak to expand his lungs, after being whipped repeatedly by a whip tipped with bone fragments. And he did it out of love for you and for me.

It is traditional for Christians to make meaningful personal sacrifices during the six weeks leading to Easter. During the early days of Christianity those sacrifices were substantial and painful. In recent years we have become so lenient with ourselves that we give up things we don't need in the first place, like cream in our coffee or chocolate. Modern sacrifices have become almost meaningless. Until the Pandemic of 2020. Now we know what sacrifice truly is. Now we know how to give up what we need until it is painful!

As this Good Friday draws to a close, picture the sky turned black. Picture the bloodied and broken body of Christ on the cross. Picture His body being placed in the tomb. Picture the stone being rolled in front of the entrance to the tomb, where he will remain until Sunday morning.

**Holy God, even as we long for relief from the sacrifices that are required of us, we wait with excitement for tonight and tomorrow to pass because we know the joy that is before us. Amen.**

**Saturday, April 11, 2020  
Read Matthew 27:62-66**

**Dark Saturday**

Saturday is the Jewish sabbath, and this Saturday was no different in that respect. The law required that bodies be entombed before sundown on Friday so preparation could be made for the Sabbath. Jesus was in the tomb. It's interesting that the Jewish leaders feared that he would escape! Do you think they knew deep down in their hearts that Jesus was really the Messiah? They went to the governor, Pilate, and asked that he place military guards at the entrance of the tomb so Jesus wouldn't escape. They claimed they thought Jesus' followers might come get his body, but I think even Pilate knew better. In frustration Pilate agreed to send a couple of Roman soldiers to stand guard – but we know how that ended.

Today, though, is a dark day. Jesus is in the tomb. Our souls need for us to pretend that we don't know what will happen tomorrow. Today is a day for grief. Jesus has been put to death.

What are you grieving today? Discuss that with your family members in your home and/or on the phone with others. Jesus is the answer for our grief, sorrow, frustration, loneliness ...

Hang on! Easter's coming.

**Heavenly Father allow our souls to experience the depth of meaning in this day. Keep us from being held in darkness of spirit. Prepare us for tomorrow. Amen.**

**Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020  
Read Matthew 28:1-10**

**Resurrection Day**

Several years ago, I had the privilege of standing alone in the empty garden tomb in the side of the hill believed to be Golgotha. The impression of the face of the skull is still on the face of the rock wall of the hill. It was a deeply spiritual experience to stand where Jesus' body may have been entombed. My imagination took me to that first Easter morning and suddenly I

was one of the three women who discovered that empty tomb. Shock. Surprise. Amazement. Confusion. These were but a few of the emotions they must have felt. Jesus' body was gone! It was much later before they understood what it all meant.

Do we understand what it means? I don't know anyone who claims to fully understand what God has done, is doing, and will do for his creation. But we do know that the empty tomb means that our Savior defeated death, paid the price of our sins, and offers us salvation to both abundant life today and eternal life when physical life ends. Do you know Jesus with your heart as well as your head? He did it all for you.

For fun...how many symbols of Easter can you think of? Make a list and think about how they symbolize Easter.

Here's one. Put on your white shoes (My late mother and all the Southern Belles in my genealogy say it's ok now.) and celebrate the new life of Easter.

Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Hallelujah!

**Thank you, Jesus, for giving us life eternal. Thank you for the opportunity to live life abundantly.**

Written by Rev. Dr. Gloria L. Youngblood  
First United Methodist Church  
PO Box 1210  
1000 Main Street  
Many, LA 71449

\*Hymn lyrics from the *United Methodist Hymnal*.

\*\* *Wesleyan Love Feast* adapted and abbreviated from the liturgy provide by the Louisiana Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and available on its web page at [la-umc.org](http://la-umc.org).

If you find this worship guide to be helpful, you have permission to share it with others.