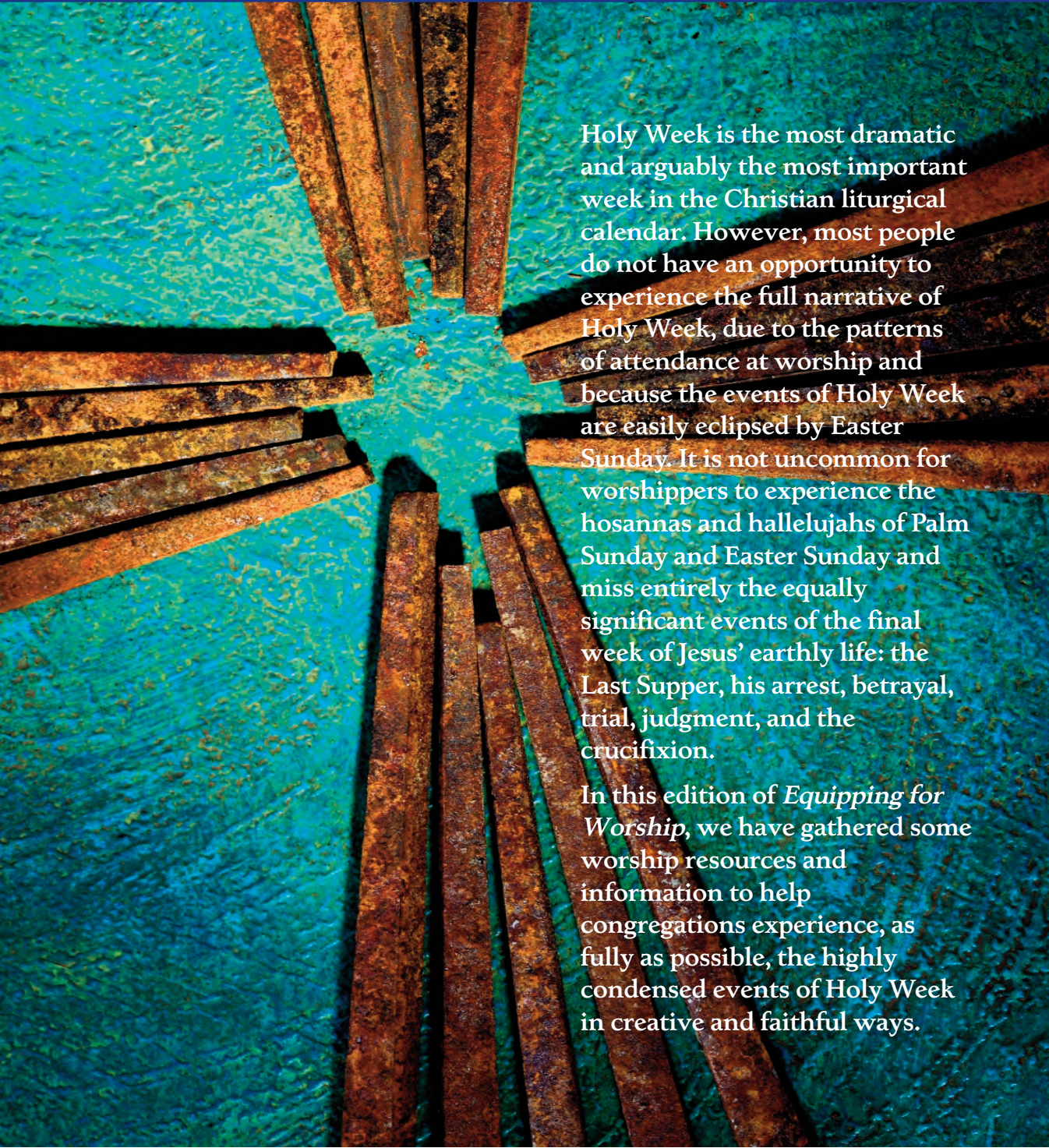


## Renewing Liturgy at Holy Week

Ian McDonald

A photograph of a wooden cross on a green textured background. The cross is made of dark, weathered wood and is centered in the image. The background is a vibrant green with a mottled, textured appearance. The cross is composed of two main beams, one horizontal and one vertical, with smaller beams for the arms and base. The wood shows signs of age and use, with some darker spots and a rough texture. The overall composition is simple and focused on the cross as a central symbol.

Holy Week is the most dramatic and arguably the most important week in the Christian liturgical calendar. However, most people do not have an opportunity to experience the full narrative of Holy Week, due to the patterns of attendance at worship and because the events of Holy Week are easily eclipsed by Easter Sunday. It is not uncommon for worshippers to experience the hosannas and hallelujahs of Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday and miss entirely the equally significant events of the final week of Jesus' earthly life: the Last Supper, his arrest, betrayal, trial, judgment, and the crucifixion.

In this edition of *Equipping for Worship*, we have gathered some worship resources and information to help congregations experience, as fully as possible, the highly condensed events of Holy Week in creative and faithful ways.

# Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday

The Sunday immediately before Easter Sunday is designated as Palm/Passion Sunday. The double-barrelled name acknowledges two aspects of this important time. The first is the triumphant arrival of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem where he is hailed as king; it also marks the tragic beginning of Holy Week, where Christians recall Jesus' passion (suffering and death). Often the Sacrament of Holy Communion is celebrated on this day in lieu of a Maundy Thursday service. Some congregations celebrate only Palm Sunday and have a celebration of communion on another day during Holy Week or on Maundy Thursday. Other congregations focus more on the Passion of Christ and have a more sombre service. The service in this resource provides for the full remembrance of many of the themes and events of Holy Week in one service.

This Palm/Passion Sunday liturgy is in the style of a "Lessons and Carols" service, an order of worship we are familiar with from the seasons of Advent and Christmas. The strong use of

scripture drives this service forward as the events of the last week of Jesus' life are told in story and song. The style and mood of the music matches the tenor of the readings so that the arc of the service moves the worshipper from joyful praise to quiet contemplation. While it might be worth creating and embedding some brief meditations within the service to help orient worshippers, by no means are short reflections necessary. Using a variety of readers and brief silences between the readings and the hymns may highlight features of the scriptures and give people an opportunity to reflect more fully on each part of the narrative. In a week filled with many events and services, a contemplative service that departs from the ordinary may be welcome and very

meaningful. Congregations that do not have a regular worship leader or a minister may find this resource especially useful as well as simple to plan and lead. This order of service could be easily amended and used on Maundy Thursday or Good Friday.



## The Gathering

Consider placing the announcements at the beginning of worship so the service can proceed uninterrupted.

The members of the congregation who are willing may be invited to gather at the back of the sanctuary with their palm branches or other signs of celebration (flags, ribbons, banners, handkerchiefs, etc.) and song sheets as the first reading is heard.

## Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem

Reading: Matthew 21:1-9 (or Mark 11:1-10 or Luke 19:28-40 or John 12:12-19)  
Hymn: 214 All glory, laud and honour

During this hymn, the congregation (or some portion) processes to their seats while singing the hymn and waving the palms, etc.

### Call to Worship

See the bulletin insert provided by PWS&D or go to [www.presbyterian.ca/church](http://www.presbyterian.ca/church) year to access prayers and other worship resources.

Prayer of Adoration  
Prayer of Confession  
Assurance of Pardon

## Sharing a Meal Together

Reading: Matthew 26:17-20, 26-30 (or Mark 14:12-16, 22-25 or Luke 22:7-23)  
Hymn: 224 An upper room did our Lord prepare (verses 1 and 2)

If it is the practice of the congregation to celebrate communion on Palm/Passion Sunday, it may be celebrated here.

## Jesus Washes the Feet of His Disciples

Reading: John 13 (selected verses)  
Hymn: 224 An upper room did our Lord prepare (verses 3 and 4)

## Prayer in a Garden

Reading: Matthew 26:36-45 (or Mark 14:32-42 or Luke 22:39-46)  
Hymn: 230 Go to dark Gethsemane

## Prayers for the World and One Another

The prayers may reflect some of the themes of Holy Week by remembering those within the community who have reason to celebrate, those who do not have enough to eat, who serve, who feel rejected and forgotten, who are dying and grieve, etc.

## Denial and Acceptance

Reading: Matthew 26:69-75 (or Mark 14:66-72 or Luke 22:54-62 or John 18:15-18, 25-27)  
Reading: Matthew 27:28-31; 33-37 (or Mark 15:16-32 or Luke 23:26-43 or John 19:16-27)  
Hymn: 220 My song is love unknown

## Death and Destruction

Reading: Matthew 27:45-51 (or Mark 15:33-41 or Luke 23:44-49 or John 19:28-30)  
Hymn: 217 Ride on, ride on in majesty

## Dismissal

Leader: As the drama of this week unfolds, are you prepared to come to the table and share a meal with Christ whose life is poured out for you?  
**All: By the grace of God we are.**  
Leader: Are you prepared to serve one another as Christ has served you?  
**All: By the grace of God we are.**  
Leader: Are you prepared this week to watch with Christ and pray in the moments of quiet and contemplation?  
**All: By the grace of God we are.**  
Leader: Are you prepared to follow Jesus into the dark night of betrayal, chaos and death?  
**All: By the grace of God we are.**  
Leader: Are you prepared to seek new life and the resurrection?  
**All: By the grace of God we will.**

There may be an appropriate benediction said here or all may depart in silence. Some congregations maintain the tradition that there is no benediction at the end of the services during Holy Week, as the services are considered parts of one service culminating with the benediction on Easter Sunday.

# A Simple Maundy Thursday Service

You will need bread, wine, and juice for communion and a table, basin and water.

We gather to mark the last day of the earthly life of Jesus. After the story is read, sing the printed refrain each time, using the familiar music of "Were you there when they crucified my Lord," and spend a few moments in silent reflection.

**Leader:** This is the day,

**All:** that Christ gathered with his disciples in an upper room.

**Leader:** This is the day,

**All:** that Christ shared a meal as a sign of his great love.

**Leader:** This is the day,

**All:** that Christ took a towel and washed the disciples' feet and showed us how to serve others.

**Leader:** This is the day,

**All:** that the Lord has made.

Matthew 26:17-25 - The Passover with His Disciples

**Were you there when he gathered with his friends?**

**Were you there when he gathered with his friends?**

**O, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.**

**Were you there when he gathered with his friends?**

(silence)

Matthew 26:26-30 - The Lord's Supper

**Were you there when he gave them bread and wine?**

**.....when he gave them bread and wine?**

(silence)

Consider a simple communion service with everyone gathered around the table. You may use a simple service like the one below that does

not necessarily use responses, so that people can have their hands free to pass the bread and wine.

## Invitation:

We gather together and spread this table to remember the love, care and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Let us pray.

## Prayer:

Creator of heaven and earth, you spoke and order emerged from chaos, creation from the formless void, and light from darkness. You formed us in your image and called us to be your people. You spoke words of truth and law and created us a community. Through the prophets you called us to justice and peace. In the fullness of time your word became flesh and lived among us, and in him we saw your full glory. He shared our human nature; he lived and died as one of us. He taught those who sought to follow his way; he healed the sick, ate and drank with outcasts, cured the blind, and proclaimed the good news of your kingdom. We give you thanks for Christ, for the gift of your love and grace. Pour out your Spirit upon us and on these gifts of bread and wine, that they may become the body and blood of Christ and that we, nourished by them, may become the body of Christ in the world.

## Remembering the story:

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins; do this, as often as you drink of it, in remembrance of me."

## Sharing the Bread and Wine

## Prayer after Communion:

Holy God, on this night Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment, to love one another as he loved them. Write this commandment on our hearts and strengthen us in service, in unity and in love. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen

John 13 (you may chose selected verses) - Jesus Washes the Feet of His Disciples

**Were you there when he knelt and washed their feet?**

.....when he knelt and washed their feet?

(silence)

**Leader:** On the night of his arrest, Jesus gave the disciples a new commandment and set an example for them by washing their feet. In this act of service, he reminded them to care for and serve one another. Therefore, come forward to be washed and to wash one another, to serve and to serve one another. Remember your baptism and remember you are called to serve humbly as Christ has served us.

A basin of water is placed on a small table or stand before the communion table. Members of the congregation gather around the basin and briefly wash each other's hands in turn, so that each person has their hands washed by the person ahead of them and then washes the hands of the next person. When everyone is done washing and being washed, they return to their seats.

Matthew 26:36-45 - In Gethsemane

**Were you there when he knelt and prayed to God?**

.....when he knelt and prayed to God?

(silence)

Matthew 26:47-56 - The Betrayal and Arrest

**Were you there when his friends betrayed and ran?**

.....when his friends betrayed and ran?

(silence)

At the conclusion of the service, the congregation leaves in silence. Consider sharing a simple meal together after the service.



## A Prayer for Lent

(based on a an ancient prayer of the church)

Give me, O God, a steadfast heart,  
which will not be drawn down by  
unworthy distractions;  
Give me a courageous heart,  
which will not be worn out by trials;  
Give me a pure heart,  
which no trivial matter may divert.  
Give me understanding to know you,  
diligence to seek you,  
wisdom to find you,  
and faithfulness that will finally  
embrace you,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

If the congregation uses hangings and colours to mark the liturgical seasons, purple is usually used for the season of Lent. From Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday to Holy Saturday the hangings are often changed to red, if the congregation has them. Some congregations continue to use purple, while others opt to remove all hangings during Holy Week.

## A Prayer for Good Friday

First and Last,  
Creator of the world,  
Lover of the world,  
Life of the world,  
beside you there is no other.  
We come to the foot of your cross,  
and we bow our heads with disciples;  
we ponder the mystery of your life and death with Mary;  
we proclaim the truth of who you are with those who  
witnessed your life and death.  
We come to you this day, because you first came to us.  
We come loving you, because you first loved us.  
We come to serve you, because you first served us.  
We come to worship you as the Creator,  
Christ,  
and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and always.



## A Prayer for Easter

(based on a prayer by John of Damascus)

O Day of Resurrection!  
Let us shine with joy,  
for Christ has led us  
from death to life, from  
earth to heaven.  
Christ has risen from the  
dead!

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