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A prolonged 'Holy Saturday'

We have already become 'a different sort of church' in unprecedented ways. The very place in which the body of Christ finds its identity, offers prayer, and receives solace in time of crisis—that is, the church building—is not available to us, and, as in the early days of our faith, public gatherings of Christians outside the home are forbidden. Nevertheless, we are finding ways to join in prayer and intention; to cry 'Abba, Father'; and to recognise we are all buried with Christ by baptism into his death, that we might walk in newness of life. The present situation does not negate the joy we have been granted in the resurrection, but it will be lived out this year in different ways.

Holy Week and Easter, in particular, will give us opportunities to reflect on all of these matters. In the annual commemoration of the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we explore who we are and our relationship to the God who loves us. We are enabled to realise, quite counter-culturally, that everything that we have that is good is a gift, and not a right. Unlike God, we, as humans do not always have the answers.

We can reflect that, even in the hardest of times, even in the prolonged 'Holy Saturday' of emptiness in which we find ourselves, there is always hope. God, whose nature is mercy, sent his Son, who experienced the fullness of our own human suffering and makes all things new. We are still called upon to serve those within and beyond the church, and to care for the vulnerable. Our historic structures still place us at the heart of the community and indeed of public life. Those of us in the church are sometimes called upon to be spokespeople for our ecumenical partners and for those of other faiths who are experiencing similar difficulties to our own.

In these dark times, when it is not possible to recall the death and resurrection of Christ in our church buildings, we have the opportunity to mark Holy Week at home. We can discover how what we are now experiencing may contribute to our own ongoing journey as God's people. The homes in which we now mainly find ourselves offer us a place in which our faith can be discovered afresh, where we can find 'the Church within'. Some of the suggested activities nod in that direction. In the renewed hope that will come from remembering the story of our salvation, we hope that all the faithful will experience the genuine, unreserved joy of Easter.

Activities during Holy Week

The following list outlines a number of suggested activities. This list is by no means exhaustive but could form the basis of diocesan and local observance this year. You will see there is also reference to a number of national initiatives which the local church could join. Those who are organising diocesan or local projects are encouraged to use their time, skills, and talents to minister to the particular needs of their congregations. 'Clergy who choose to record or stream worship from their homes will be in solidarity with their congregations, who are similarly unable to worship in church buildings.

In general, this is a fruitful time to engage prayerfully with Scripture. The Passion and Resurrection narratives in the Gospels, the Biblical Stations of the Cross (in *Common Worship: Times and Seasons*) and the daily Eucharistic readings, among other texts, can be studied through the practices of *lectio divina* or [Dwelling in the Word](#). The Diocese of Chelmsford is sharing resources to mark '[Holy Week at Home](#)'.

On social media, there will also be daily reflections from the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Church of England will launch a Stations of the Cross podcast series and short films which explain the various facets of Holy Week, together with daily audio of Prayer During the Day, Night Prayer, and Sunday service broadcasts. All will be signposted from the Church of England social media channels and website. Read more about Holy Week and Easter in this [Church of England blog](#).

Palm Sunday

Suggested activities

- Recording and sharing the Matthean Passion narrative. A form of this narrative which can be used in a sequence of times and places in the home has been [shared by Bishop David Wilbourne](#) and may be helpful for wider use. The national Precentors' Network has [recorded a Passion for online sharing](#).
- Make your own 'palm' cross out of paper or card [using this video](#).
- Families/households: make your own cross out of paper or card, and blu-tack to window

National initiatives

- A pre-recorded Palm Sunday Eucharist with the Bishop of Manchester will be released on the [Church of England's Facebook page](#).
- The Archbishop of Canterbury will publish a reflection on [Facebook](#) and his [website](#).

Important advice:

- Gatherings, whether indoors or outdoors, cannot take place.
- Note that we advise against distribution of palm crosses on public health grounds.

Maundy Thursday during the day

Suggested activities

- Renewal of ministerial vows, if this is the diocese's existing practice, may be done via Zoom or other technology, using each diocese's existing form of service where possible. This will be a valuable reassuring reminder and sign of continuity in changing circumstances.
- The Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda has produced [films for each day of the Triduum](#) which can be shared.

Important advice

- Oils must not be distributed. It might be sensible to use the blessing and distribution of oils at a later time, as one of the rites which celebrates the return of the people of God to their church buildings and congregations (see below).
- The renewal of ministerial vows need not include the celebration of Holy Communion.

Maundy Thursday evening

Suggested activities

- Some bishops and priests may wish to celebrate Holy Communion in their homes – **see footnote**.
- The *Walking the Way of the Cross reflections* (by Paula Gooder, Bishop Stephen Cottrell, and Bishop Philip North) may be used, either as a devotion or a start for Bible study.
- Other forms of Bible study (Mark 14.22-26, Luke 22.14-23, 1 Corinthians 11.23-25).
- Traditional images and symbols may have new resonance (the stripping of the altars...).
- Washing each other's feet in the home (between members of the same household only), or something in relation to hand-washing.
- Making bread, or dough twisters, with a grace about Jesus being the living bread.

Important advice

- The Jewish *Seder* has sometimes been copied by churches, but there are significant sensitivities around Christian appropriation of this practice, and it is not encouraged.

- In some churches a communal *agape* meal is shared on Maundy Thursday. It should be emphasised, if this happens, that such meals, whether conducted online or in the home, are distinct from the celebration of Holy Communion, which must be presided over by a priest. *Lent, Holy Week, Easter* (SPCK, 1986) shows how this can be done.

National initiatives

- The Archbishop of Canterbury will publish a reflection on [Facebook](#) and his [website](#).

Footnote

David Kennedy outlines the tension between *agape* meals and Holy Communion in *Using Common Worship Times and Seasons 2: Lent to Embertide* (London: CHP, 2008), pp.69-70.

Good Friday

Suggested activities

- Dramatic reading of the Johannine Passion narrative.
- A Three Hours Devotion, delivered using technology.
- The [Reproaches](#) (see *Times and Seasons* for contemporary language text).
- Music and art, as well as other sensory stimuli, might be creatively used, especially today.

National initiatives

- The Archbishop of Canterbury will publish a reflection on [Facebook](#) and his [website](#).

Holy Saturday

Suggested activities

- Preparing an Easter garden (whether using plants or as a craft activity); preparing and painting Easter eggs.
- Making a donation to an appropriate charity.

- Observing the Easter Vigil in some form at home (either here or early on Sunday). Some networks are planning recorded or live-streamed vigils with wide participation.

National initiatives

- The Archbishop of Canterbury will pray the Exultet, offering some reflections on 'waiting in hope':
- The Archbishop of Canterbury will publish a reflection on [Facebook](#) and his [website](#).

Easter Day

Suggested activities

- Some bishops and priests may wish to celebrate Holy Communion in their homes.
- Practising spiritual communion as this is a day on which all ought otherwise to receive Holy Communion in church.
- Lighting a candle at dawn using the following prayer:

Christ yesterday and today, the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega, all time belongs to him, and all ages; to him be glory and power, through every age and for ever. Amen.

- Observing the Easter Vigil in some form at home.
- Musical activities: hymn singing/something for church musicians to do.
- Joining in with the '[Sing Resurrection](#)' initiative from CTBI, which encourages everyone to sing the hymns *Jesus Christ is risen today* and *Thine be the glory* outdoors at 10 am (words and tunes included at the link).

National initiatives

- BBC Radio 4 and the [Church of England Facebook page](#) will broadcast the Archbishop of Canterbury's Easter Day service, with the Bishop of Dover
- The Archbishop of Canterbury will publish a reflection on [Facebook](#) and his [website](#).

Holy Communion on Maundy Thursday and Easter Day

Particularly on Maundy Thursday evening and Easter morning, bishops and priests may wish to celebrate Holy Communion in their homes – including in chapels or oratories, in other rooms, or (on Easter morning) in their own gardens. If they do so, they should make clear that this is in intention an expression of the shared life of the Body of Christ, not the offering of an individual.

Other bishops and clergy may choose to abstain from celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion for such time as this is not physically accessible to lay people. They may choose to follow this course of action intentionally for the duration of the present emergency.

Recognising that they do so in real but separated company with those for whom they have spiritual care, some bishops and priests may choose to stream celebrations of Holy Communion. If so, those participating remotely should be encouraged to use the [Act of Spiritual Communion on the Church of England website](#). As the introduction to that liturgical material explains:

The Book of Common Prayer instructs us that if we offer ourselves in penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', although we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves. Making a Spiritual Communion is particularly fitting for those who cannot receive the sacrament at the great feasts of the Church, and it fulfils the duty of receiving Holy Communion 'regularly, and especially at the festivals of Christmas, Easter and Whitsun or Pentecost' (Canon B 15).

Participants in a streamed service of Holy Communion should not be encouraged to place bread and wine before their screens. Joining together to share in the one bread and the one cup as those physically present to one another is integral to the service of Holy Communion; this is not possible under the current restrictions, and it is not helpful to suggest otherwise. Any idea of the 'remote consecration' of the bread and wine should be avoided.

Bishops should assure priests that their homes are proper places for the celebration of Holy Communion, and remind them that, needless to say, the same reverence should naturally be accorded to the sacrament in the home as in church. In particular, if the sacrament is reserved in a priest's home for ministry to the sick, it should be stored in a 'seemly and reverent' manner in a suitable and secure place.

Bishops may wish to give authorisation to those priests who seek it to celebrate services of Holy Communion at which other participants are not physically present. It should be made clear that such authorisation will not extend beyond the period of the current Corona-virus related restrictions.

Looking forward

It is not too early to think about the ways in which we might commemorate our return to public worship and to our church buildings. How should we celebrate the return to our worshipping communities and our friends? the re-opening of buildings? the blessing and distribution of the oils? And how should we grieve for those whom we have lost? Holy Week, in these unprecedented circumstances, may offer us some clues to how we will resume our worshipping life together, and how it will be completely different from the one we paused.

A locked church

Ah my dear Lord, the church is locked
but let my heart be open to your presence;
there let us make, you and I,
your Easter garden;
plant it with flowers,
and let the heavy stone be rolled away.

by Alan Amos

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