

Online Services for Holy Week and Easter 2020

Ideas from the PC(USA) Office of Theology and Worship

This resource is intended to provide guidance for ministers leading worship in the church sanctuary or at home (depending on local circumstances), live-streaming for congregation members who are self-isolating, quarantined, or homebound due to the Covid-19 coronavirus.

It will be helpful for those worshipping at home to make preparations in advance, finding an appropriate place to take part in the service and securing necessary materials: Bibles, orders of worship, hymnals or song-sheets, candles, etc.

You will find the following materials in this document:

- a list of best practices for **live-streaming worship**, applicable to other services beyond Palm/Passion Sunday, Holy Week, and the Resurrection of the Lord;
- **recommendations for Palm/Passion Sunday**, including a simple outline for an online service, notes on the liturgy in the 2018 *Book of Common Worship*, and a list of hymns in the public domain found in recent Presbyterian hymnals;
- ideas and resources for **celebrating the Three Days (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil) at home**;
- and **recommendations for the Resurrection of the Lord (Easter Sunday)**, including a simple outline for an online service, notes on the liturgy in the 2018 *Book of Common Worship*, and a list of hymns in the public domain found in recent Presbyterian hymnals.

General Considerations for Live-Streaming Worship

- Stay close to the camera and microphone for best audio and video quality
- Make eye contact with the camera as much as possible for personal connection
- Do a trial run, especially if you're using multiple devices or screen-sharing
- Keep it brief; online attention spans are short and distractions are abundant
- Unison readings are awkward; use short, repeated phrases for participation
- It may be helpful to ask those who are not speaking to mute their microphones
- Use chat features for responses (amen, thanks be to God, hear our prayer)
- Or decorate and use "liturgical response cards" [[large](#), [small](#)] (thanks to John Leedy)
- Chat features may also be used for prayer concerns; but remember this is public
- Hearts, likes, views, shares, etc. help to provide a sense of gathered community
- With appropriate preparation, highlight leadership from children and youth
- For singing together, have a single leader; ask those singing along to be on mute
- Alternately, use call and response songs where worshipers echo or answer the leader
- If singing is not possible, use hymn texts as prayers or devotional readings
- Before worship, provide info to facilitate participation (scriptures, songs, prayers)
- After worship, follow up on prayer concerns to offer care and build relationships

Palm/Passion Sunday

Simple Outline for Online Worship

Opening Sentences or Greeting
Hymn or Song
Prayer of Confession
Scripture and Sermon
Prayers of Intercession
Offering and Thanksgiving
Hymn or Song
Blessing and Charge

Liturgy for Palm/Passion Sunday

Notes on texts from the Book of Common Worship (WJKP, 2018) 263–271

- Encourage people to prepare **improvised palm branches** and share videos or photos
- Invite children to participate in “**at-home processions**,” in place, in circles, or outside
- At appropriate points in the service, invite people to **wave palm branches or hands**
- The **opening sentences** (pp. 264–265) might be adapted with other “beatitudes” fitting for this time: “Blessed is ____,” or “Blessed are ____,” with worshipers responding, “Hosanna in the highest!” Leaders might begin and end with, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.”
- The **litanies for Lent** (pp. 233–235) would both be appropriate for Palm/Passion Sunday. Number one is a summary of the forty days of Lent, especially relevant in this time of “wilderness and exile.” Number two focuses on Christ’s passion, especially relevant at a time when so many are suffering and dying. Both involve a simple, repeated refrain that would be easy to teach and use in live-streaming worship.
- The **thanksgiving for baptism** (p. 235) offers a way to remember and give thanks for our covenant relationship in the body of Christ, especially at a time of distance and isolation.
- The **prayer of confession** for Lent (p. 236, spoken by one leader) or Solemn Reproaches (pp. 287–289, 308–309, divided among multiple readers) may be used on Palm/Passion Sunday. Worshipers may sing, say, or type, “Lord, have mercy” or “Kyrie eleison,” and may respond to the declaration of forgiveness with “Amen” or “Thanks be to God.”
- Before the **prayer for illumination** (p. 266), the leader may light a candle; other worshipers may wish to do the same at home.
- On a video conferencing platform, you might divide **scriptures** (by verse, e.g.) among several readers. Be sure to rehearse this in advance to avoid technical difficulties.
- **Sermon** note: “On Palm/Passion Sunday the Scriptures speak for themselves (and at some length). The irony of the Lenten season culminates in Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The call to die leads to Gethsemane and Golgotha. A brief homily, if any, will suffice to connect the dots.” (See pcusa.org/matthew25, “A Year with Matthew for a Matthew 25 Church” for more sermon prompts like this one.)
- Invite a child to speak the **affirmation of faith**, with worshipers responding, “Amen.”

- **Prayers of intercession** (pp. 238–239) should be adapted to include specific prayers for the church and world in a time of pandemic. The ancient Solemn Intercession (pp. 285–287, divided among several leaders) is also appropriate for Palm/Passion Sunday. In particular, congregations are encouraged to pray for ...
 - those who are sick and suffering;
 - those who are grieving the loss of loved ones;
 - medical personnel and others who work to help and heal;
 - those who are subjected to racist abuse and discrimination;
 - those whose livelihood is threatened by business closures;
 - families learning to live, work, and learn together in close quarters;
 - those who are not safe in their homes;
 - those who are struggling with isolation, loneliness, or addiction;
 - those separated from loved ones because of travel and immigration restrictions;
 - churches seeking to discern new and faithful forms of ministry;
 - and wisdom for leaders as they seek to respond to this crisis.
- The **offering** (p. 267) can be received electronically. For the One Great Hour of Sharing, typically received at Palm/Passion Sunday and/or Resurrection of the Lord (Easter Sunday), see specialofferings.pcusa.org/offering/oghs/. To explore opportunities for regular online giving, visit presbyterianfoundation.org/onlinegiving/.
- The **prayer of thanksgiving** (pp. 245, 306) is provided for occasions when the Lord’s Supper is not celebrated; it omits the words of institution and prayer for the Holy Spirit characteristic of the church’s Great Thanksgiving. It may be used if congregations wish to share non-sacramental food and drink as a way of “remembering our communion” (like the reaffirmation of baptism) at this time of refraining from intimate communion. It might also be adapted as a blessing for a meal at home to follow the online service.
- The **blessing and charge** (p. 271) can be a good opportunity for online participation and signs of community. Encourage worshipers to remain online when the service is over and share “hosannas” or other messages of prayer and peace.
- After the service, post, message, text, etc. **#Hosanna2020** to your circles of friends

Public Domain Hymns for Palm/Passion Sunday

GTG = Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal (WJKP, 2013)

PH = The Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs (WJKP, 1990)

- All Glory, Laud, and Honor (GTG 196, PH 88)
- Hosanna, Loud Hosanna (GTG 197, PH 89)
- Ride On! Ride On in Majesty (GTG 198, PH 91) *music in PH 90 under copyright*
- Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed (GTG 212, PH 78)
- In the Cross of Christ I Glory (GTG 213, PH 84)
- What Wondrous Love Is This (GTG 215, PH 85) *melody only; harmonization under copyright*
- Beneath the Cross of Jesus (GTG 216, PH 92)
- Ah, Holy Jesus (GTG 218, PH 93)
- They Crucified My Lord (GTG 219, PH 95)
- Calvary (PH 96)

- Go to Dark Gethsemane (GTG 220, PH 97)
- O Sacred Head, Now Wounded (GTG 221, PH 98)
- Throned Upon the Awful Tree (PH 99)
- When I Survey the Wondrous Cross (GTG 223/224, PH 100/101)
- Were You There (GTG 228, PH 102) *melody only; arrangement under copyright*

The Three Days: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil

Ideas for Worship at Home, Personal Devotion, and Online Reflection

- Ecumenical resources for at-home services are available at pcusa.org/covid19
- Maundy Thursday focuses on Jesus' service and love: how can you love and serve today?
- Good Friday features Jesus' outstretched arms: how can you embrace the world today?
- Easter Vigil tells the story of God's saving love: how will you remember, share the story?
- Use "Seven Last Words" (BCW p. 311) to prompt reflection, discussion on social media

Handwashing: A Spiritual Practice for Maundy Thursday

- *Prepare a pitcher of water, a bowl, and towels*
- *Prayerfully pour water over each hand (or allow a family member to do so)*
- *As you do so reflect on the grace and love of Jesus Christ poured out in your life*
- *Sing "Live in Charity" (GTG 205) or another setting of Ubi caritas*
- *Dry your hands (or those of family members) with a towel*
- *Conclude with this or a similar prayer:*
O God, your love is embodied in Jesus Christ, who washed disciples' feet on the night of his betrayal. Wash us from the stain of sin, so that, in hours of danger, we may not fail, but follow your Son through every trial, and praise him always as Lord and Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.** (BCW 276)

Prayer of Lament: A Spiritual Practice for Good Friday

- *Read, pray, or sing Psalm 22 or another psalm of lament*
- *Reflect on the state of the world, the church, and your own life*
- *Offer these things to God in prayer, seeking God's saving power*
- *Read, pray, or sing the psalm a second time*
- *Conclude with this or another psalm prayer (see BCW 928–1077):*
Eternal God, your Son cried out in anguish from the cross, and you delivered him. Do not hide your face from those who cry out to you. By his death and resurrection bring life where there is death: feed the hungry, strengthen the weak, and break the chains of oppression, that all people may rejoice in your saving deeds through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.** (BCW 946)

Thanksgiving for Light: A Spiritual Practice for the Easter Vigil

- *Light a candle and read John 1:1–5*
- *Reflect on and give thanks for times where you see God's light shining in darkness*
- *Conclude with this or a similar prayer:*
We praise and glorify you, Lord God, for Christ, our life, is risen and has conquered sin and death. He has broken the chains that bind us and freed us to live in his kingdom of light. May Christ enlighten the hearts of all who believe. May Christ transform this world that longs to see him, enlightening the hearts of all who believe, and restore all creation to its rightful place. Glory, praise, thanksgiving, and blessing to you, O God, victor over sin and death, now and forever. **Amen.** (BCW 831)

Resurrection of the Lord (Easter Sunday)

Simple Outline for Online Worship

Opening Sentences or Greeting
Hymn or Song
Prayer of Confession
Scripture and Sermon
Prayers of Intercession
Offering and Thanksgiving
Hymn or Song
Blessing and Charge

Liturgy for the Resurrection of the Lord (Easter Sunday)

Notes on texts from the Book of Common Worship (WJKP, 2018) 316–331

- Encourage people to wear flowers, share videos or photos of **signs of new life**
- Invite children to organize “**at-home parades**,” in place, in circles, or outside
- At appropriate points, invite people to **make joyful noises** with instruments, voices
- The **opening sentences** (pp. 317, 330–331) might be adapted with other statements of encouragement fitting for this time: “Do not be afraid: ___,” with worshipers responding, “The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!” Leaders might begin and end with, “Do not be afraid: Jesus is risen!”
- The **litanies for Easter** (pp. 317–319) would both be appropriate for the Resurrection of the Lord (Easter Sunday). Number one focuses on joy and praise, summarizing Easter proclamations of the early church from Peter and Paul. Number two is Easter in a “minor key,” a prayer for deliverance from suffering and death. Both involve a simple, repeated refrain that would be easy to teach and use in live-streaming worship.
- The **thanksgiving for baptism** (p. 319) offers a way to remember and give thanks for our covenant relationship in the body of Christ, especially at a time of distance and isolation.
- The **prayer of confession** (p. 320) should be spoken by one leader. Worshipers may sing, say, or type, “Lord, have mercy” or “Kyrie eleison,” and may respond to the declaration of forgiveness with “Amen” or “Thanks be to God.”
- Before the **prayer for illumination** (p. 320), the leader may light a candle; other worshipers may wish to do the same at home.
- On a video conferencing platform, you might divide **scriptures** (by verse, e.g.) among several readers. Be sure to rehearse this in advance to avoid technical difficulties.
- **Sermon** note: “What does it mean to believe in resurrection? For Christians, this is our joyful affirmation that Jesus is risen from the dead. But it is also our call to a new way of life, a new orientation for the people of God. We believe that God is still working to bring new life to the world.” (See pcusa.org/matthew25, “A Year with Matthew for a Matthew 25 Church” for more sermon prompts like this one.)
- Invite a child to speak the **affirmation of faith**, with worshipers responding, “Amen.”

- **Prayers of intercession** (pp. 322–323) should be adapted to include specific prayers for the church and world in a time of pandemic. In particular, congregations are encouraged to pray for ...
 - those who are sick and suffering;
 - those who are grieving the loss of loved ones;
 - medical personnel and others who work to help and heal;
 - those who are subjected to racist abuse and discrimination;
 - those whose livelihood is threatened by business closures;
 - families learning to live, work, and learn together in close quarters;
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- After the service, post, message, text, etc. **#Hallelujah2020** to your circles of friends

Public Domain Hymns for the Resurrection of the Lord (Easter Sunday)

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PH = The Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs (WJKP, 1990)

- Jesus Christ Is Risen Today (GTG 232, PH 123) *Korean trans. in GTG, desc. in PH under copyright*
- The Day of Resurrection (GTG 233, PH 118)
- Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain (GTG 234, PH 114/115)
- O Sons and Daughters, Let Us Sing (GTG 235/255, PH 116/117)
- The Strife Is O’er (GTG 236, PH 119)
- Thine Is the Glory (GTG 238, PH 122)
- This Joyful Eastertide (GTG 244)
- Christ the Lord Is Risen Again (PH 112)
- Christ the Lord is Risen Today! (GTG 245, PH 113) *melody only; harmonization under copyright*
- That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright (GTG 254, PH 121)