

## A USER'S GUIDE TO HOLY WEEK

Holy Week is the seven day period when all of Christendom focuses its energy and attention on the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We remember the events of Holy Week by telling the story. We read and preach from Holy Scripture that speaks of our need for saving and Jesus' love for humanity, that took Jesus to a death he didn't deserve and beyond.

We remember the events of Holy Week by enacting the story. We not only watch or listen, but we actively engage the stories through actions - eating a meal together, foot washing, singing, adoration of the cross, and other actions that bring these stories alive for us.

This is the time to bring the children! They are fascinated with worship that is different from our Sunday worship, and also affords the children a chance to participate - what child doesn't love splashing water?

The week begins with **Palm/Passion Sunday**. We bless palms and carry them in procession into the church as we remember Jesus who made his way into Jerusalem to face betrayal, a trial, torture, and death. Our attention turns from the procession with palms to remembering Jesus' journey to death.

### **Monday in Holy Week - Evening Prayer**

Even though it won't be dark when we gather, we come together in the quiet of late afternoon to hear a word of love.

Today's gospel commemorates the anointing of Jesus by Mary, a foreshadowing of his death and burial. Isaiah speaks of the suffering servant who is a light for the nations and who faithfully brings forth justice. For Christians, Jesus' suffering is the path to resurrection and new life. We eagerly await the celebration of the great Three Days later this week.

### **Tuesday in Holy Week - Healing Service**

Are you tired? Are you weary? Do you need healing?

We gather this day acknowledging our sin, and with laying on of hands and prayer, come to the source of our salvation for healing. This is also the day when the holy oils, used for baptism, the sick, and those preparing for baptism.

Paul proclaims Christ crucified as the wisdom and power of God. Jesus speaks of the grain of wheat that falls into the earth and dies in order that it may bear fruit. We die with Christ in baptism so that we may be raised with him to new life. We will celebrate this great mystery of death and resurrection at the Easter Vigil later this week.

### **Wednesday in Holy Week - Taizé Service**

We gather again, singing simple music that by its nature, is gentle and contemplative. Children learn the melodies quickly as do us older ones. This day was formerly called "Spy Wednesday," an allusion to the gospel accounts in which Judas is identified as the betrayer of Jesus. As Jesus endured the suffering of the cross, we are called to run the race of life

with perseverance, confident of the joy to come. In the Three Days, which begin tomorrow evening, we will journey with Christ from darkness to light, from captivity to freedom, from death to life.

**Maundy Thursday** begins The Three Days, which from today through Saturday, we concentrate all our attention on Jesus' journey to the cross and beyond. Just as the events of these three days are connected, so is our worship, as today, Good Friday and Holy Saturday form one unit.

This day gets its name from the Latin word *mandatum* which means commandment. The liturgy includes the option of foot washing - the example Jesus gave of love and service that will identify us as Christians. Reconciled with God and with each other, we celebrate dinner together and Holy Communion and then, in the sanctuary, sit as Psalm 22 is recited and the altar is stripped and all candles, linens and any decorations as we ready our holy space and our hearts for

**Good Friday**, our most solemn day on the church calendar.

Life and death stand side by side as we enter into Good Friday. In John's passion account, Jesus reveals the power and glory of God, even as he is put on trial and sentenced to death. Standing with the disciples at the foot of the cross, we pray for the whole world in the ancient bidding prayer, as Christ's death offers life to all. We gather in solemn devotion, but always with the promise that the tree around which we assemble is indeed a tree of life. We depart silently, and we anticipate the culmination of the Three Days in the Easter Vigil.

Our day begins with an **Ecumenical CrossWalk**, where the Ridgefield Community gathers at Mooresmere, St. Paul, St. James, and St.

Matthew's as we through Holy Scripture meditations and song, remember Jesus' Passion. We walk to each church with volunteers carrying a cross.

**Stations of the Cross** - we walk around the sanctuary using each of the pictures (stations) to reflect on Jesus' betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

**Tenebrae** - a service where we hear the last words of Jesus, as we acknowledge our need for forgiveness and reflect on Jesus' triumph on the cross, that gathers all humanity into God's loving care.

**Easter Vigil** - who doesn't like fire and light, darkness and water, dancing and singing, solemnity and laughter, as we gather, hear stories of how God has saved God's people, over and over again, and, as the lights come up, and the alleluias ring out, we celebrate the first Mass of Easter!

This is the night of salvation! At the Vigil of Easter, we gather around fire, word, water, bread, and wine, proclaiming through story and song that ours is a God who continuously brings life out of death. On this night we experience again the heart of God's baptismal promise and the center of our faith: we are claimed and cleansed, renewed in the death and resurrection of Christ. We gather with all the saints of every time and place to celebrate the good news: Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

