

Let's observe *Holy Week* before we sing *hallelujah!*

We've entered Holy Week, and I hope and pray that we will not skip from the hosannas of Palm Sunday right to the hallelujahs of Easter Sunday. It's important, as we travel through this week, to see not only incredible sacrifice and love that God has shown us in Jesus Christ, but all of the human condition that comes out during this week.

On Sunday, of course, we shout "hosanna" because we welcome the Messiah. Which Messiah do we welcome? The one we want or the one we need? And then at the end of that Palm Sunday service we take time to hear that we'll in fact be going to dark Gethsemane.

In my former synod it was our tradition to take Tuesday in Holy Week as a special time and a liturgy for our pastors and deacons where they could take a moment to rest and prepare for the crush of events ahead. They would renew their vows. They would receive Holy Communion. They would hear the word and receive oil.

Then we moved to Maundy Thursday. A command Jesus says [is] that "you are to love each other as I have loved you." And Jesus, as a servant, stoops to wash their feet and also gives us his Holy Supper, in which his body is broken and his blood is shed.

And then on Good Friday very often we have congregations taking the part of the people in the crowd when they shout, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Hosannas to "crucify!"

And then [on] Holy Saturday, this day that I think that we miss at our peril — it's usually so filled with preparations for the next day that we don't take time to realize that Jesus rested in the tomb. That a beating heart stopped. That he breathed his last and was in this space. It invites us to come into that space and shed all of those things that get in the way of our understanding and experiencing the love of God in Christ.

Many of our congregations have Easter vigil services at night, and they're wonderful, because now unreservedly we sing and say, "Hallelujah!" The lights come back on. There's singing and rejoicing as we prepare for Easter. And then, on Easter Sunday, let the hallelujahs ring. We know now that God has encountered us in all of our brokenness and in all the ways that we stumbled, as we're so clear during the whole Holy Week narrative. But nevertheless, God would rather die than lose a single one of us. And since Jesus has died, he has also been raised and we are promised this new life. This gives us the strength and the hope and the ability to be witnesses to this new life, that in fact life is stronger than death. So sing "hallelujah," dear church. Happy Easter.



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