



April 1, 2020

HOLY WEEK PILGRIMAGES

What does Holy Week look like when we can't go to church?

We should ask our ancestors. In the middle ages, making a pilgrimage from western Europe to Jerusalem were profound experiences of faith, undertaken by an astonishing range of people. But when a pilgrimage to Jerusalem was impossible, due to the distance, or to war, Christians found spiritual alternatives. When they could not travel to Jerusalem, where Jesus was welcomed with Palms, spoke to the crowds in the Temple court, and broke the bread of Passover before his arrest, they got creative.

Instead of Jerusalem, Christians made pilgrimages to the great Cathedrals. The pilgrims in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales are traveling from London to visit the shrine of St. Thomas Becket. In France, the Chartres Cathedral, built in the 13th century, includes a stone labyrinth laid in the floor. At the end of their journey, pilgrims followed the labyrinth from the entrance at the outside of the circle into the center, and then back out again. The Labyrinth became a prayerful substitute for the streets of Jerusalem.



The labyrinth is not like a maze that offers choices and the chance to get lost. The Labyrinth is a single path that covers all four quadrants of the circle in a weaving pattern. It is a spiritual, prayerful practice, one that has been rediscovered in recent years. There is an outdoor labyrinth in a park close to our church. It is tucked in a corner of the clocktower park, just across the street from Green's Hardware.

We cannot gather together for Palm Sunday or Easter, but we can adapt to other spiritual practices, and our adaptations might lead us to discover new gifts, and new traditions. In recent weeks, we have adapted to video connections for worship and prayer.

In 2020, Holy Week is a time for new kinds of journeys.

- Read a passage of the gospel each day, beginning with Palm Sunday, which can be found in Matthew, chapter 21.
- Take a walk in your neighborhood, imagining it as Jerusalem, where Jesus is both welcomed and rejected.
- Walk the outdoor labyrinth, like your spiritual ancestors before you.
- Take a pilgrimage through music, prayerfully listening to Handel's *Messiah*, parts two and three, or to Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, or the cast recording of *Godspell*.
- Make a daily practice of giving. Send a letter each day to someone you care about. Make a daily donation.

During Holy Week, as we mourn the loss of worship in the sanctuary, let us receive the gift of a new kind of spiritual journey to Jerusalem.

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Matthew Wooster
Senior Minister