



Thinking ahead about Holy Week

What is going on in the story of Holy Week?

Why was Jesus crucified?

What was being defended?

There is a huge gap in many places between Palm Sunday and Easter with no infill of the story between. We talked about how the churches can tackle this – and other issues that surround Holy Week.

The story works when it makes connections with our story: especially the difficult bits of loss, bereavement, betrayal.

Here are few ideas that emerged from the conversations at Fulwood, Sale and Windermere

Holy Week

Some of the things our churches do now

Palm Sunday

- Taize Evening Service – quiet and meditative service, in readiness for the events of Holy Week
- Hand out colouring books to tell the story of Holy Week – one story per page - Palm Sunday, overturning tables in the temple, Last Supper, etc etc .
- One church produces a sheet of prayer and readings for the week, which is distributed via the newsletter – much wider distribution than simply church members.

- Service begins on lawn outside church, Children read the story, and then go round the outside area waving branches and singing – re-enter church on reading of Jesus entering the temple. Children go to own worship and adults work through the Passion story
- A couple of churches use the Christmas tree, shaved and stripped and formed into a cross. Then names written on Palm Crosses and attached to, or left in front of cross for prayer.
- Ecumenical Open air service in main town / village square
- On the Saturday before Palm Sunday a coffee morning is held with Easter competitions, bringing in people who are not church attendees.

During Holy Week

- Ecumenical Service on the Tuesday, an Agape (see ‘useful links’ for more information)
- Ecumenical gathering throughout Lent, then Holy Week meditations every evening for ½ hour
- We heard stories that told of the numbers attending daily events gradually increasing through the week
- Colouring Books with simple line drawings that tell the story and which may also appeal to adults. (Google ‘Christian Colouring Images’ or similar for suitable images) *Note: be careful about copyright*
- One church created a mural with children where each section depicted a day of Holy Week. This could be spread over the week or represent a day’s workshop. This also re-engages with the Stations of the Cross idea
- In a large room, use a Labyrinth with different visual stations: e.g. Crown of thorns, robe, oil, nails and hammer. Some are contemplative – some interactive e.g. invited to bang nails into wood. Holding a cross, to take into centre of labyrinth and leave before a larger cross. *(Churches can borrow the Synod Labyrinth – ask Linda Rayner about booking it out)*
- Ecumenical group of churches holding short service each day rotating round churches
- Different aspects of Holy Week focussed on each day and very rooted in community, e.g. praying outside banks and hearing the story of Jesus and the moneylenders
- One community offers a Quiet Zone in the Shopping Precinct. This is an ecumenical, drop-in point offering a chance to meditate, pray, have conversation, engage in art work. Planned mid-day short prayers

- Drop in hour each day in church with meditative prompt cards for each day of the week. Notices outside invite the community to participate
- Fun day/s for children – depending when schools break up, with lot of crafts. Use of film and discussion. (“Man Dancin” recommended)
- Follow Christian Aid pilgrimage with opportunity to donate daily

Maundy Thursday

- Joint Maundy Thursday evening service with sister churches – including Holy Communion / Agape, chairs in a circle (See ‘useful links’ for Agape information)
- Tenebrae service in evening, 12 candles lighting the church, 12 readings, at the completion of each reading a candle is extinguished. Leave in silence (See ‘useful links’ for Tenebrae information)
- Informal Maundy Thursday Evening service, chairs gathered in U shape, everyone brings food/sandwiches, share juice, very ‘much like a casual Holy Communion’.
- Seder meal on Maundy Thursday evening (See ‘useful links’ for a suggested order of service and an explanatory website)
- Tableau scenes were set up in different rooms of the church – small group of people walked around, moving from dark to light as scenes moved from the last supper, through to Gethsemane, into the high priest’s house etc. Use of simple props, e.g. anglepoise on table highlighting: cup, plate, bread
- Evening Holy Communion service, set down central aisle, candles on tables. At the end of the service the candles are snuffed out, the people leave in darkness.
- Holy Communion meal, may be formal or informal, sometimes preceded by foot-washing, then followed by a reading of the Gethsemane narrative in open space beside church, disperse in silence.
- Variations on Holy Communion include: a Seder meal, silent communion, danced, celebrant dressed as clown, with hot-cross buns as part of messy church.
- Another, very creative idea for Holy Communion was to set 2 circles of chairs in church. Start at the circle with the communion table, then move to the second circle, which is candlelit for ‘Gethsemane’ then disperse outside.

Good Friday

- Good Friday Walk, involving all local churches (including ministers and children) starting at 6.00am at one church with a hymn, stopping at designated points for readings, ending at the castle/high point with a hymn. About 60 people attend, then back to one church for coffee and biscuits.
- Good Friday vigil for three hours, selection of readings, following each reading a gift symbolic of that reading is taken to the altar and a candle snuffed out.
- Good Friday ecumenical service at 9.30am at 2 churches on the outskirts of the village, each attended by 4 churches (encompassing 8 churches in area). Then walk to centre of village, where there is a service outside the church which is most central.
- Good Friday walk includes 7 churches from the centre of town, begins at the Catholic Church and moves on to the Unitarian. Series of readings and hymns. Over 200 people attend and it is growing.
- Lots of variations on the Walk of Witness – usually Ecumenical. (There are occasional issues with police and local authorities where roads and traffic are affected.)
- A Good Friday afternoon service followed by afternoon tea
- A reading of the whole passion story
- Services usually ecumenical, some public some very meditative.
- Tenebrae Service (*See 'useful links' for Tenebrae information*)
- Stations of cross written by prisoners
- Tomb made out of willows in church grounds (bent over branches), large stone over entrance, children put out crosses covered with scraps of linen.
- Give out hot cross buns in shopping precinct
- Use of Christmas tree, stripped and turned into cross, draped with cloth and crown of thorns

Ideas that emerged

- During Holy Week, invite different groups that use a church to decorate a windowsill each, rather than just a floral display for Easter Sunday. Based on reminiscences of Easters past and what Easter means to them
- Community meal with mini drama in middle (Before pud!)

- Prepare an exhibition about the local community at Easter (maybe old photographs / scenes or modern paintings / art competition on the theme of Easter etc etc) and try to exhibit it in the library – or other community building. (Make sure it gets a lot of publicity)
- Make sure that the COMMUNITY knows what you're doing – contact the papers, put notices in libraries and distribute leaflets
- Use DRAMA - we heard stories of Passion plays, including one using differing voices. These can be obtained for all four gospels but John's gospel practically spells out the stage directions! (Download from www.nwsynod.org.uk)

Making time for preparation

- Lent meetings can be used for the preparation of Holy Week and Easter material – eg setting up the colouring books / producing the prayer books / thinking about how to set up the tableau rooms
- 'Easter Saturday' can be used as a workshop for decorating the church

Other thoughts and ideas

- Youth events: may depend when they are on holiday.
- In one place the walk of witness on Good Friday ceased as the local shoppers were bored/irritated by it and the 'witness' was becoming very negative. However a local church working with ex-prisoners invited them to create artwork on a Good Friday and they were positioned in local shopping centre and used in a 'stations' of the cross' service to great effect
- Other places hand out Hot Cross Buns to the (somewhat bemused) shoppers, who are usually appreciative and can sometimes be engaged in conversations about the cross
- In many cases the ecumenism of Lent may break down as each denominations has its own designated services – it may be worth thinking about how to keep the ecumenical aspect going throughout the season

It's all about connections

making Holy Week mean something to other people