

## **An Introduction to Home Pilgrimage**

Considering that we cannot possibly do what we've always done for Palm Sunday and Holy Week this year, I believe this is the perfect time to try something new! Actually, the practice of a Holy Week pilgrimage is an old, old tradition. In the fourth century, a woman named Egeria wrote to the women of her home church as she traveled to many holy sites including Jerusalem, remembering many sacred moments from the life of Jesus. In Jerusalem, she joined many other pilgrims in traveling through the stories of Holy Week. We are not traveling to Jerusalem or even to our own church building this year, but pilgrimage can happen right here at home.

A pilgrimage is a journey somewhere in between a vacation and a mission trip. Instead of seeking rest or doing good works, pilgrims seek to explore their world in hopes of also exploring the Divine. We go to holy places seeking God. In this home pilgrimage, we seek to encounter Christ in the places of our own lives. We will find that the Holy Spirit can build a sanctuary in the most mundane spaces of our homes.

All you will need is a Bible, an attentive heart ready to jump into Jesus' story, and a house to explore. If any of the locations described in these prompts are not part of your current dwelling place, adapt them to suit your situation. If you are by yourself, this pilgrimage can be between you and God. If you have others in the household, invite them to join you. You can do this journey all at once, in one prayerful day, or you can space out the reflections throughout the week. I have recommended days for each site, but ultimately the timing is up to you and God. Don't rush through, and don't worry about reading everything right on time. If you're still working on this after Easter comes and goes, that is fantastic! That means you are spending lots of time with God over the course of many days.

May the peace of Christ which passes our understanding sustain you on this journey, in this season, and in all your life.

--Pastor Virginia Greer

## **Front Door (Sunday)**

Read: Psalm 118:19-29

Reflect: On Palm Sunday, the people are excited to welcome Jesus! They don't have a red carpet to roll out, so they throw their clothes on the ground. They don't have confetti cannons, so they wave palm branches. The people believe that Jesus is a big deal, and they want to welcome him into Jerusalem with all the right fanfare.

When we know we have special houseguests coming for a visit, we try to make our homes as welcoming as possible. We put away all the clutter, we use our good dishes and silverware, we choose our best recipes to prepare, and we dust every corner. We try to give guests our best. And when a long-awaited visitor arrives, we greet them excitedly at the door!

Respond: What is one small task you might do if you knew a special guest would be arriving soon? Do it now. Jesus is arriving!

## **Back Door (Sunday)**

Read: Matthew 21:1-11

Reflect: The people welcome Jesus with great fanfare, but he doesn't come into the city with a regal caravan. He doesn't even ride a horse. Instead, he chooses an untrained donkey colt. He rides an animal that everyday people might own. He is surrounded not by powerful civic and military leaders, but by friends.

When close friends or family members who live nearby and visit all the time come over, we don't make a big deal of it. They might let themselves in the back door and meander through our normal, not-specially-cleaned home to find us and say hello. They're not concerned about the house. They care about us.

Respond: Jesus might like a clean house, but he cares most about our hearts. Consider one thing you can do right now to make your heart more ready for Jesus' arrival. (And yes, committing to follow along on this home pilgrimage all week counts!)

## **Office/Desk/Workspace (Monday)**

Read: Matthew 21:12-17

Reflect: The sales happening in the temple were nothing more than business as usual. They regularly took advantage of people in poverty,. Jesus disrupted their usual business and challenged everyone who heard to remember what really mattered, why they were coming to the temple at all. He called them to set aside their self-interest and turn to prayer.

Look around at your office or desk. Does it look different than it did back in January? This pandemic has disrupted business as usual. In the middle of this shocking disruption, I believe God is here with us. We are figuring out what meetings and what tasks really matter. We are setting aside our self-interest in order to care for the community as a whole, and I sincerely hope we are turning to prayer as well.

Respond: Think about the things you need to do this week. Is there something that used to seem really important that doesn't matter so much now? What things matter now more than ever? Write these things down, and put the note somewhere you will see it after this is all over. Maybe it could go on the mirror, by your calendar, or on the refrigerator. When you come across it after life has changed again, remember what you discovered really mattered.

## **Kitchen (Tuesday)**

Read: Matthew 26:6-13

Reflect: From a practical standpoint, the disciples are right. There were much more effective ways for this woman to do good in the world with that bottle of perfume. She could have sold it and given the money to the poor, as they suggested. But instead, she used it to worship. Jesus says she prepared him for burial. Another way to understand this: she anointed him for the work he was about to do for us.

Anointing has a rich history in the Bible. Samuel anoints David to identify him as Israel's new king. In the book of James, elders of the church are told to anoint the sick. We have a couple different accounts of women anointing Jesus' feet. Those who are anointed are set apart for a purpose, for some kind of work that we pray God will do in them. I wish we could go out and anoint all the healers and all those who are sick.

Respond: Using whichever oil you have in your kitchen, anoint one another by dipping your thumb in oil and drawing the sign of the cross on one's forehead. You can say these words: "[Name], I anoint you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Then pray for one another and for all of those who are sick, whether in body or spirit, and those who are doing healing work. If you are home alone, you can anoint yourself. You might also anoint a doll or similar item as a symbol of all those who are fighting sickness right now, and pray for them.

## **Dining Room Table (Wednesday or Thursday)**

Read: Matthew 26:17-35

Reflect: A lot can happen over a meal. Family feuds can begin or end with a casserole dish. In this Scripture reading, one meal shows us the depth of Jesus' love for humanity and the complete unworthiness of humanity. Judas is there, already planning to betray Jesus. Peter is there, trying to support Jesus, but later he will also let Jesus down. And knowing all of this, Jesus took bread and broke it and offered it to all at the table. "Take and eat. This is my body, broken for you." And he shared the cup with all at the table. "Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus chose this moment to give us the sacramental gift of Holy Communion. At a dinner where humanity's sinful shortcomings were on full display, where it was abundantly clear that we were not worthy to dine with Christ, Jesus set the table and gave himself for us. This is grace. This is the invitation to come to the table, ready or not, especially when we're not.

Now, we cannot celebrate Holy Communion together in this time. Read verse 29 again. We will gather around the table again after all of this, and it will be that much more meaningful once we know what it is to wait with Jesus for that feast.

Respond: Even though we must wait for Holy Communion, we can and should commune together right now! Have a snack or a meal at your table with someone else. If you're alone in the house, call someone and share this 'table time' over the phone. Where two or three are gathered, whether in person or on the phone or in a videochat, Christ is here with us at our table.

## **Yard (Thursday)**

Read: Matthew 26:36-56

Reflect: This moment shows us how Jesus handles ‘crisis mode.’ A lot of us are coming in and out of crisis mode these days, and we all handle this stress differently. But all of us can learn from the way Jesus responds to the greatest stress he ever faced. He went for a walk and prayed. He told God the truth of how he was feeling, even when it was ugly. He admitted he didn’t want to do what God asked of him, and he prayed for the strength to do it anyway. And prayer made all the difference! See how Jesus reacts to the crowd who came to arrest him. He is calm, filled with that peace which passes our understanding, even when Peter lashes out on his behalf. In this time, and in all times, let us pray honestly and boldly like Jesus for the strength we need for the work God has called us to do.

Respond: The psalms are prayers. Find psalm 31 and pray it, aloud, here in your yard. Let the psalmist’s words be your own. Reflect on which parts of the psalm felt the most authentic, and which parts felt like someone else’s prayer.

## **Living room (Thursday)**

Read: Matthew 26:57-74

Reflect: This is a trial scene, so it makes sense that everyone is focused on putting the blame on one person, but that still strikes me. How often do we find ourselves gifted at explaining what someone else did wrong? Often, we find it very hard to say, “Actually, here’s what I could have done better in that situation.” And yet, even when it’s possible others did something wrong, most of the time there is also at least one way we can do better, too.

Peter was thinking about how wrong the religious leaders were for arresting Jesus, and because he was so preoccupied, he didn’t remember Jesus’ warning about what he, Peter, would do until it was too late.

Respond: Think of the last time you blamed someone for something. Did it help? Was there some way you could have held yourself accountable as well? The next time someone gets on your nerves, try to offer grace before anger. Think about what you can do well, instead of focusing on what someone else has done poorly.

## **Restroom (or anywhere with a sink) (Friday)**

Read: Matthew 27:11-26

Reflect: We are all about washing our hands right now! However, Pilate's hand-washing here means something different. He's not trying to prevent the spread of a virus. In fact, he's stepping out of the way to let fear, anger, and mob mentality do as they please. He had the option to take responsibility for what was happening, use his authority, and send everyone home. Instead, he washed his hands and announced that this whole situation was not his responsibility.

But that's not how responsibility works. I am the oldest of four children, and when I was babysitting the others, if anything happened, it was my responsibility. It didn't matter which sibling did it. I should have stopped it. There is a lot that's beyond our control right now. Unlike Pilate, let us take control of what we can. It is our responsibility to follow safety guidelines and encourage others to do so as well.

Respond: What was avoidance for Pilate is one of the most effective ways we can take responsibility right now for that which we can control. Wash your hands! If you're tired of Happy Birthday, the Lord's Prayer takes about 20-25 seconds.

## **Outside, where you can see a road (Friday)**

Read: Matthew 27:27-56

Reflect: Imagine the spectacle: Jesus, unable to lift the cross himself; accompanied by Simon of Cyrene, lugging a weighty cross through the street; escorted by mocking guards, surrounded by crowds that join in the mockery. Then as Jesus is hung on the cross, even the men dying beside him mock him. (Another gospel account, Luke 23:36-43, tells us that one of these men repented, but that man is not mentioned here.) It seems the whole community came together to mock Jesus and demonstrate the worst of humanity.

We have that same capacity. Communities coming together can be a force for evil and cruelty, but they can and often are a powerful force for goodness. Together, we are stronger. Let us use that strength to do good and glorify God. And when we find ourselves in groups, whether in person or online, that pull us in less holy directions, let us resist the mob mentality and choose God's path instead.

Respond: Choose a community project to participate in. (Examples: chalking encouraging messages or art on sidewalks, 'bear hunt' bear in the window, hearts in the window to show support for healthcare workers, donating food to the blessing box or food pantry, mailing encouraging notes to our local nursing home)

## **Bedroom (Saturday)**

Read: Matthew 27:57-66

Reflect: Remember that when Jesus died, it seemed like any other death, albeit a particularly gruesome one. Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene, and another woman named Mary ensured that he was buried and his body was treated with care. They did not expect him to leave the tomb. So they did what they could to care for his body, and then they waited. They rested. They grieved. Perhaps they worried about what would come next. We know what's next, and so when we tell this story to children we can easily skip from the burial straight to Sunday morning. But there is a whole, long day between Friday and Sunday.

Many churches around the world treasure the Easter vigil service, held on Holy Saturday. In the early church, this was when new converts were baptized and welcomed into the community. The vigil is kept between sunset on Saturday and sunrise on Easter morning. It is a time of faithful waiting for the morning and anticipation of the joy the morning will bring.

Respond: I will not ask you to keep awake late at night. I would rather you sleep early, so that you can wake up in time to watch the sunrise! So before you go to sleep on Saturday night, put a candle or light in a window. If you don't have something smaller, you could leave a light on in the house or on the porch. Let the light in the darkness be a reminder that though we must wait, we know that the light is coming.