

Friends in Christ,

Once upon a time, I preached an Easter sermon comparing the packed sanctuary to a tomb—a beautiful and static place where we come to look for Jesus only to learn that he has gone ahead of us out into the world. "He is not here," the messenger says.

This year, neither is anyone else.

The church, which Paul calls *the body of Christ*, has left the building. Perhaps one of the silver linings of our present pandemic is that we are finally, more fully learning that church is a people, not a place. Church is a movement, not a museum—or a mausoleum. Church is a way, not a destination. Jesus is alive, and on the loose in the world spreading transformation and hope (resurrection) like a virus that breathes not death, but new life.

Easter is God's decisive investment in life. As Easter people, we promote life however we can, including staying safely away from one another as much as possible until our public health crisis passes. We will, therefore, mark Holy Week in a very different way.

Before I outline the specifics, I want to invite you to receive this unusual year as a unique gift. That might seem strange, but it is no stranger than claiming the cross as the icon of good news. Holy Week plunges us into the center of the mystery that it is our pain, suffering, isolation, and death which God transforms into our hope and salvation. God doesn't lead us around trouble but through it, redeeming even our suffering by turning it into a crucible that refines us. This year we might just taste the fear, loneliness, despair, and, finally, the joy of Jesus in a fresh way.

Holy Week begins April 5 with **Palm Sunday**. In preparation, I encourage you to go outside, breathe fresh air, and gather palms with which to begin the celebration with a parade at home; a resource for doing this is enclosed. After your household's Palm Sunday parade, watch the worship video which will be posted at sovlc.org and on our Facebook page at 9:30 am.

The Three Days, the holiest time of the Christian year, begin April 9 with **Maundy Thursday**. All SOV members are scheduled to receive a worship bag along with blessed elements for Holy Communion delivered by a team of volunteers. (If you would like to help make deliveries that day, please contact Wendy Torres in the office to sign up! If you would prefer to get out of the house and take a short drive and pick up your bag, please call the office by Monday, April 6 to schedule a socially distanced time for you to pick up your bag on Thursday.) We will do our best to honor the real presence of Christ in the bread and wine by sharing the feast exactly as homebound Christians regularly do. Please consume Communion some time on Thursday so that we are sharing the feast together as best we can on the day that Christ gave it to us. Additional instructions will be included in the worship bag. A worship video will be posted that evening at sovlc.org and premiering on our Facebook page at 7:00 pm.

Good Friday's worship video will be posted the following day, April 10, at 7:00 pm.

Easter Vigil has been canceled. A festive worship celebration with Bishop Erwin and our partners from the Twin Valleys Lutheran Parish will take place when public gatherings are once again permitted.

Easter Sunday's worship video will be posted early on Sunday, April 12. I encourage you to watch before 11:00 am, when Shepherd of the Valley will "host" a virtual Easter brunch by ZOOM. Dress up in your finest and prepare a meal. At 11:00 am, I will share a table prayer and then we can share conversation together while eating simultaneously in our homes. Here is the invitation link for our brunch "meeting" on at 11:00 am PDT on Sunday, April 12:

Easter Sunday Congregational ZOOM Brunch Party

<https://zoom.us/j/240144663>

Meeting ID: 240 144 663

I look forward to seeing your faces on my screen on Easter morning and celebrating with you the certain good news of God: love triumphs. Life wins. Christ is risen. Alleluia!

Peace and joy,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pastor Brian Hiortdahl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Pastor Brian Hiortdahl

P.S. A friendly, gentle, yet important reminder that while worship gatherings are suspended, our commitments continue. As you are able, please continue to glorify God and support Shepherd of the Valley with your offerings. As always, thank you for your faithful partnership!