

Why Mormons Should Celebrate Holy Week

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EACH SPRING THE CHRISTIAN WORLD celebrates the most important week in history—Passion Week or Holy Week, the time between Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem and his atonement, death, and resurrection. Throughout the world the majority of Christians mark these special days—Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good or Great Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday—with special services and ceremonies. For many Christians, the preparation for this week begins on Ash Wednesday, the day when Lent begins, the forty days of fasting and penitence before Easter. Passion week is the last week of Lent. One commentator has called these days “the most concentrated, symbol-laden, primitive, critical, foundational, animating . . . liturgical time in the Christian calendar. . . . [During this week] we stand before the emotional well-spring of Christian liturgical experience.”¹

The last week in Christ’s life encompasses both his most tragic and his most triumphant days. These days mark not only the last week in Christ’s life but also constitute one of the world’s great dramas, one filled

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1. James Oregan, “Celebrating Holy Week’s Symbols,” retrieved on March 1, 2004, from <http://www.jamesoregan.com/Liturgy/litholyweek.htm>.

with both earthly and cosmic import. In many ways, it is an archetypal drama—the low-born, uncrowned king of Israel riding on an ass, hailed by the common folk with palm fronds and garlands of flowers as he descends from the highest point on the Mount of Olives to enter the great City of Kings. Instead of his enthronement, however, his death is plotted by his enemies. Before they succeed, he clears the temple, teaches in the synagogue, instructs his disciples, introduces the sacrament, washes the feet of his chosen twelve, and goes to Gethsemane. There, his suffering causes him to bleed from every pore and fall upon his face in astonishment at the pain he has to bear. He is betrayed, beaten, and spat upon; is taken before Pilate; and is forced to carry his own cross until he stumbles under its weight. Finally, he is taken to Calvary where he is nailed to the cross, drinks the bitter cup, forgives his torturers, and yields up his spirit. He is laid in the tomb provided by Joseph of Arimathaea from which he rises triumphant on Easter morn, the victor over death and the devil. There is no greater story in all the annals of human myth and history.

Christians celebrate this week, as Dennis Bratcher of the Christian Resource Institute says, “to commemorate and enact the suffering (Passion) and death of Jesus through various observances and services of worship.”² While these seasonal celebrations differ from church to church, a full commemoration includes:

- Lent: the forty-day fast between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, which symbolizes Christ’s forty-day fast in the wilderness and signifies the worshipper’s willingness to identify with Christ’s privation and suffering.
- Palm Sunday, which in many churches includes a service which both celebrates Christ’s entry into Jerusalem and foreshadows his later suffering.
- Holy Monday, which includes a Eucharist service.
- Maundy Thursday, a Eucharist service, a foot-washing ceremony, and a vigil until midnight which symbolizes the apostles waiting for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Increasingly, Christians also celebrate a Passover meal on this night.
- Good or Great Friday: special services of meditation and prayer

2. “The Days of Holy Week,” The Christian Resource Institute, retrieved on March 1, 2004, <http://www.cresourcei.org/cyholyweek.html#Palm>.

that focus on the suffering Christ endured on the cross. This is the only day of Holy Week during which there is no Eucharistic celebration (although sacramental emblems saved from the previous day's service are served in some churches). Some traditions include walking the Stations of the Cross to mark Jesus' journey to Golgotha. Other traditions include a *tenebrae* (Latin for "shadows" or "darkness" sometimes called "Service of Darkness") in which candles are "gradually extinguished to symbolize the growing darkness, not only of Jesus' death, but also of hopelessness in the world without God. The service ends in darkness," or sometimes with the final candle, representing Christ, being carried out of the sanctuary, "symbolizing the death of Jesus."³

- Holy Saturday, which often includes an Easter vigil after sundown in a darkened church as "a time of reflection and waiting, of weeping that lasts for the night while awaiting the joy that comes in the morning."⁴
- And finally, Easter Sunday, which represents the culmination of all these events and is marked by special services, some at sunrise, that are joyful celebrations of the resurrection.

Thus, Holy or Passion Week is a full-hearted, full-spirited commemoration of the crowning events of Christ's life. It is a time of sober reflection, quiet contemplation, and, ultimately, joyful celebration. It is a time when Christians renew their covenants with the Lord and refresh their devotion to him. It is the holiest season of the year, even more so than Christmas, because Christmas celebrates the promise of salvation whereas Passion Week celebrates its reality.

The seeds of liturgical practices which characterize Holy Week are found in the primitive church. It is likely that, in spite of the growing fragmentation and disintegration of their ecclesiastical community, the earliest Christians began to mark at least some of the events of Holy Week while the apostles were still alive. In speaking of other early liturgical rites, early Christian historian Henry Chadwick remarks, "The form and pattern of the actual rites used in the period before Constantine and the Nicaene council can be known only very imperfectly from scraps and frag-

3. Dennis Bratcher, "Good Friday, or Holy Friday," *ibid.*

4. Bratcher, "Holy Saturday," *ibid.*

ments of evidence contained in casual passing allusions or in illustrations of an argument about other matters.”⁵ There is evidence, for example, that within the first century of the Christian era Christ’s resurrection was celebrated each Sunday rather than once a year. As Greek culture specialist Gary Van Haas reports, “From the earliest days after Pentecost, the Apostles designated the first of the Sabbath of each week for the remembrance of the Resurrection of Christ.” According to Van Haas, this practice still characterizes the Greek tradition: “In Greek religion, every Sunday is dedicated to the Resurrection of the Lord, but one hundred days also are dedicated to Easter, 50 before its actual preparation, and another 50 after it in commemorating the glorification of the Lord. Easter is therefore considered, the ‘Feast of Feasts.’”⁶

According to Chadwick, beginning with the fourth century, Holy Week observances began to be formalized: “From the fourth century onwards the ceremonial structure of Holy Week evolved, first with the special observance of Maundy Thursday, then (by the sixth century) Palm Sunday. . . . The custom of holding no celebration of the Eucharist on Good Friday is found as early as 416.”⁷

As the church gained strength and prominence after Constantine, the Holy Week liturgy became more firmly established so that, by the Middle Ages, it was recognized as the most sacred week of the Church liturgical calendar. The Protestant Reformation brought some changes in attitude toward the formal marking of these events. Some Protestant churches, in an effort to separate themselves from what they considered “popish” practices, began to adopt a simpler liturgy which led to the abandonment of Lent and some Holy Week practices as well as a number of other characteristics of Catholic worship and practice. In England, especially, this retreat led to the divergence of those Christians who practiced a

5. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), 260. According to Herbert Thurston, “From an attentive study of the Gospels, and particularly that of St. John, it might easily be inferred that already in Apostolic times a certain emphasis was laid upon the memory of the last week of Jesus Christ’s mortal life.” “Antiquity of the Celebration of Holy Week,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*, retrieved on March 3, 2004, from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09399a.htm>.

6. Gary Van Haas, “Greek Easter Holy Week,” retrieved on March 3, 2004, from www.gogreece.com/learn/easter.htm, 1, 2.

7. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 259.

“low church” as opposed to a “high church” liturgy. According to Sydney F. Smith, writing in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*:

The Low Churchmen are distrustful of what they call human traditions, regard the Holy Eucharist as a symbolic meal only, hold firmly that the grace of justification and sanctification is imparted to the soul independently of visible channels, and dislike all rites and ceremonies, save those of the simplest kind, as tending to substitute an external formalism for true inward devotion. In short, the one party attaches a higher, the other a lower degree of importance to the visible Church and its ordinances; and this may suffice to justify the retention of the names [“Low Church” and “High Church”]—though it must always be borne in mind that they state extremes between which many intermediate grades of thought and feeling have always subsisted in the Anglican Church.⁸

It was, of course, out of the low-church tradition that Mormonism emerged. There was a strong anti-Catholic, pro-evangelical Christian environment in the New World when the Restoration took place, and therefore little emphasis was placed on Holy Week in early Mormonism. And although in recent years a number of Protestant churches, including some evangelical churches, have begun to include Holy Week celebrations and liturgical practices, especially noting Palm Sunday and Good Friday, more fundamentalist churches have not.

A search through Latter-day Saint scriptures, sermons, and other documents reveals very few references to Holy Week or the particular holy days within it. In fact the computerized LDS Reference Library reveals no mention of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, or Holy Saturday in nineteenth-century LDS documents, except for the designation of “Good Friday” as a date or occasional references to it as a day that other Christians celebrate. One of the very few twentieth-century references to Good Friday occurred in Elder Marion D. Hanks’s address to the April 1969 general conference: “I bear testimony and thank God for this Good Friday, tragic as are the events which it commemorates, and for what it means to me and to all men, for what it lays before men of a future, for this

8. Sydney F. Smith, “Low Church,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*, retrieved on March 3, 2004, from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09399a.htm>.

day had to happen in order that Easter and its glorious events could come to pass."⁹

Perhaps more characteristic of Latter-day Saint attitudes is Bruce R. McConkie's reference to Palm Sunday in his *Mormon Doctrine*: "Sectarians traditionally celebrate the Sunday before Easter as Palm Sunday in commemoration of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem." McConkie adds:

Among the Latter-day Saints it is the accepted practice to hail Christ as Lord, King, and Messiah, and to shout hosannas to his holy name, on all days and at all times. But it is not the common practice to single out Palm Sunday for any special commemorative worship. Rather the Latter-day Saints memorialize the transcendent events of their era, such things as the coming of John the Baptist, the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, the conferral of the sealing keys by Elijah, and the organization of the Church again on earth."¹⁰

One wonders at McConkie's "rather"; there should be no conflict between celebrating Palm Sunday in addition to these particular Restoration commemorations.

Does Holy Week play a role in the Restoration? Although we do not know the precise date of the First Vision, it is possible that it took place on Easter Sunday, April 2, 1820. Joseph records the time simply as "early in the spring" (JS-H 2:14). My reason for speculating that the Father and the Son chose this day to reveal themselves to the young Joseph is that, sixteen years later when Christ appeared to Joseph and Oliver in the Kirtland Temple, April 3, 1836, it was Easter Sunday.¹¹ That entire week, in fact, seems to have been a holy week, for on Sunday, March 27, Joseph dedicated the temple and, at the conclusion of his dedicatory

9. *Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, April 4, 1969 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1969), 25.

10. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 552.

11. Another piece of evidence to bolster the argument that certain celebratory days were significant in the Restoration is that the day Joseph took the plates from the Hill Cumorah (September 22, 1822) was the Jewish New Year. According to Robert F. Smith and Stephen D. Hicks, "New Year's Celebrations," *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, edited by John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 221: "Joseph Smith apparently had no inkling of the significance of

prayer, the congregation sang "The Spirit of God like a Fire Is Burning" and then partook of the sacrament. Joseph recorded, "We sealed the proceeding of the day by shouting hosana to God and the Lamb 3 times sealing it each time with Amen, Amen, and Amen."¹² Although Joseph does not so indicate, this is the shout given by those who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday.

The following Tuesday and Wednesday of this week witnessed the ceremony of washing of the feet, first among the presiding elders and then among a larger group of 300 Saints and, finally, as the First Presidency washed the feet of the Twelve. On this same Wednesday, according to Joseph Smith, "the Savior made his appearance to some, while angels ministered unto others, and it was a pentecost and enduement indeed."¹³ Maundy Thursday was another ceremonious day in the temple, but the historical record is silent as to whether Good Friday and Holy Saturday were celebrated in any particular manner. Easter Sunday, however, included a series of remarkable spiritual manifestations, including the appearance of Moses, Elias, and Elijah. The most glorious vision was of the resurrected Christ, who stood "upon the breast work of the pulpit. . . . Under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber: his eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was like the pure snow, his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun, and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters."¹⁴

That these remarkable events should occur during Holy Week is, to my mind, highly significant. Throughout the scriptures the Lord uses dramatic events, including the marking of significant days or anniversaries, to teach important principles. I believe that part of the message that week in Kirtland was that these holy days should be remembered. That they haven't been can be attributed, I believe, more to the insular nature of the Church during its first 150 years; to a lingering vestige of anti-clericalism, especially anti-Catholicism, including a suspicion of things

the special day upon which he removed the golden plates of the Book of Mormon from the hill near his home. It was the Jewish New Year's Day. It was also the autumnal equinox."

12. Dean C. Jesse, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 181.

13. *Ibid.*, 184.

14. *Ibid.*, 186.

“high church”; and to an investment in remaining “a peculiar people.” Thus, Latter-day Saints tend to associate such things as priestly vestments, crosses, incense, and set liturgy with a corrupt priesthood and an apostate church. In our devotional expressions and in our architecture, we prefer a nonliturgical service in which the congregants address one another to a more ritualized service addressed to deity. We identify clearly with the plain tradition of Christian worship, preferring the more horizontal to the vertical.

While I think it unlikely that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would ever become high church, there is little in the traditional devotions and celebrations of Holy Week that should be objectionable or offensive to Latter-day Saint sensibilities. I would like to suggest that, not only is the celebration of at least some of the events of Holy Week among the Latter-day Saints long overdue, but that it is entirely in keeping with and a logical extension of the Church’s new emphasis on being known as the Church of Jesus Christ.

As a move in that direction, I believe that there are a few steps we could take right now that would open the way for Holy Week observances. One would be to make spring general conference a moveable feast like Easter so that when the two coincide (or rather, collide), Easter would be given precedence over general conference. As it is now, general conference takes precedence over Easter. This has sometimes led to unusual practices. When Ruth and I were living in Madison, Wisconsin, during our graduate school years, and general conference and Easter fell on the same Sunday, the ward mission president had some of the members drive their cars to the church parking lot and then carpool back to their homes to watch conference on TV because he didn’t want others to think we didn’t celebrate Easter!

A related step would be to avoid scheduling stake conferences on either Palm Sunday or Easter. A number of years ago, we invited a nonmember friend to attend our stake conference, which was held on Easter. There was very little if any reference to Christ or the resurrection during the conference; and the concluding speaker, a General Authority, spoke for half an hour on “Archeology and the Book of Mormon.” Our friend left before conference ended; and when later I asked him what he thought of the conference, he responded, “I’m sorry. I was confused. I thought it was going to be an Easter worship service.”

I enjoy stake and general conference; but when they fall on either

Palm Sunday or Easter, I am drawn to services with other believers, celebrating with them these crowning events in the Savior's life—and in our lives. After all, conferences, no matter how inspiring, are not worship services (this is especially evident when general conference is watched on a TV screen in a darkened room), and even those that fall on Easter often do not focus on the Savior or his passion. One can always get the tapes of conference addresses, read them in the *Ensign*, or access them on the internet, but one cannot replicate the special holy feast that Easter provides.

The absence of any recognition of the events leading up to Easter is sometimes one of the most difficult adjustments for converts from other Christian faiths. I remember Arthur Henry King, the distinguished poet and Shakespearean scholar who converted from the Church of England and moved to Utah where he taught at BYU, telling me how shocked he was to find no observance of Good Friday among the Mormons. He said, "I can't believe it. They go to dances and to ball games on Good Friday." He added intensely, "That is the day my Lord died!"

When asked, "Why do members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do not observe Good Friday as other Christians do?" Joseph Fielding Smith responded with what seems a perplexing explanation:

The reason why we do not observe Good Friday should be clear enough. Easter is taken from a pagan spring holiday that was governed by the moon. The Roman Catholic Church connected the birth of the Savior with this pagan ceremony. As you know, Easter is governed by the moon, and this spring pagan festival was celebrated according to the moon, any time in March and the end of April. . . . Now as you well know the resurrection did not vary and it is foolish to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord at the end of March or the first of April, or middle of April or near the first of May, and put Good Friday the Friday before Easter Sunday. I think you are wise enough to see the foolishness of it. The resurrection of the Savior does not vary year by year but it is a constant thing. Why should we follow the silly custom rather than to have one day for the resurrection?¹⁵

According to this logic, Latter-day Saints would not celebrate either Good Friday or Easter!

A number of years ago when I was music advisor in the Los Angeles

15. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957–66), 5:155.

Stake, I arranged for our stake choir to do a performance of Bach's *St. John's Passion* on Good Friday. When I invited several ward choir directors to join in the stake choir, one of them declined, remarking, "We don't believe in Good Friday." That Good Friday, by the way, was one that I remember with special gratitude, for Bach's magnificent music touched my soul deeply as it immersed me in the events of Passion Week.

It is my hope that the Church, especially with its new emphasis on being the Church of Jesus Christ, will open the way for members to celebrate Palm Sunday and Good Friday in its devotional services. There is no doctrinal reason why this shouldn't happen; in fact, one could argue that there is a doctrinal, if not a scriptural, imperative for us to do so. At the very least the Church could encourage marking these significant days in family devotionals. Doing so would give Latter-day Saints an opportunity to focus their attention on Christ's atonement and resurrection in a concrete, sustained way, thereby increasing their devotion and strengthening the Church.¹⁶

As it is today, the vast majority of Mormons do not even pause during this week to think of the great events that profoundly affect our lives—both mortal and eternal. We go about our business, shopping, working, going to movies, going on Scout trips, holding dances, playing ball games—seemingly oblivious to the sober devotions of other believers or to the penultimate and ultimate acts of Christ's life.

One of the costs of our not focusing on Holy Week is that our Easter celebrations tend to be flat and mundane. Perhaps we don't make more out of Easter because we haven't spiritually prepared ourselves for this day of joy and gladness by preparing for it during the week before. Rarely are our Easter sacrament services marked by more than the singing of a few Easter hymns (and we have only a few) and a "talk" on an Easter theme. For the most part, we pretty much go about things in our usual way. And in doing so, I believe we rob ourselves of the opportunity to bring Christ more fully into our hearts.

Earlier I quoted Bruce R. McConkie as saying, "Among the Lat-

16. An added advantage of increasing our Holy Week devotionals is that it would give us an expanded common cause with other Christian believers at a time when the Church has placed a new emphasis on interfaith relations; it would remove some of the criticism of those who contend that we are not Christian; and it would make the adjustment of converts from other faiths more hospitable.

ter-day Saints it is the accepted practice to hail Christ as Lord, King, and Messiah, and to shout hosannas to his holy name, on all days and at all times." But this ideal is not realized in practice. Latter-day Saints rarely praise the Lord verbally, let alone hail him and shout hosannas to him continuously. When asked by a group of Christian ministers why Latter-day Saints did not have crosses on their churches, President Hinckley replied, "We believe in worshipping the living Christ not the dead Jesus." But, one wants to ask, "Why is it necessary to choose between the two? Don't we in fact worship the Lord who suffered and bled in Gethsemane and who hung on the cross as well as the one who rose from the dead?" His resurrection has no meaning without all that preceded it. It was more dramatically triumphant for those first Christians precisely because they were without hope. The light that dawned on that first Easter was made the more glorious by the utter darkness and despair that preceded it. Not to mark that despair, that deep sorrow, that time Christ's body lay in death's dark prison, is to miss at least some of the significance of that first Easter dawn that was so resplendent with his glory.

Because our own faith tradition does not celebrate the events of Holy Week, with the exception of Easter, our family has often found our own ways of marking these holy days. Ruth and I have often gone to Good Friday services at other churches. When our children were young, we sang hymns and read from the gospels on Good Friday. This past Good Friday we continued this tradition with the next generation when our young grandsons were visiting us.

Our friends David and Susan Egli first introduced us to the tradition of celebrating a Passover meal or seder on Maundy or Passover Thursday. A couple of years ago on a trip to Los Angeles, we participated in such a meal with a group of Latter-day Saint friends. In the seder, each part of the meal has meaning for both Jews and Christians. As we celebrated that meal and what it symbolizes, I couldn't help but think of what it might mean for the Church if Latter-day Saints regularly had such an opportunity.

Our Holy Week celebrations have always included generous time for listening to great sacred music. While our musical fare during this season is drawn from such works as Handel's *Messiah*, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, Mozart's *Mass in C Minor*, and a number of other major and minor sacred choral works, we are particularly drawn to Bach's exquisite music, to his Passions according to St. Matthew and St. John, his Holy Week cantatas,

his *Easter Oratorio*, and his magnificent *Mass in B Minor*. No Christian can, I believe, listen to Bach's passions dispassionately or without being immediately and deeply enveloped in the drama of Christ's last mortal week. The ariosos, arias, recitatives, choruses, and chorales tell the story of Christ's suffering with such dramatic and lyric power that we are imaginatively and emotionally present at the sorrowful events of his last week. This is particularly true with the chorales which traditionally were sung by the congregation. Bach wrote these passions for Holy Week services in the German Lutheran church, and no composer before or since has so completely captured the intense devotion and deep spiritual immersion it is possible to experience in the felt presence of Christ's passion. As Professor Robert Greenberg of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music says, "Bach's Passions demand engagement."¹⁷ At the same time, no composer has helped us feel the power of the resurrection more powerfully than Bach does in the B Minor Mass. The chorus of "Et resurrexit," which follows the quiet, almost indiscernible last notes of the "Crucifixus," explodes with such musical force that there is a powerful kinesthetic sensation that seems to symbolize Christ rising boldly from his tomb. As one of our Jewish friends who considers himself an atheist said, after listening to the B Minor Mass, "I don't believe in God, but if I did, that's what he would sound like!"

To my mind, these works, too, constitute the music of Zion—certainly so in the original meaning of that word—"the pure in heart." I imagine that when heavenly beings attend services, this is among the music they hear.

During the time I served as bishop and for periods when my wife has served as ward choir director, we have been able to create special worship services on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday and, on one occasion, on Good Friday. Ruth has prepared wonderful musical offerings for these occasions, including performances of cantatas, motets, and selections from Bach's "Christ lag in todesbanden" ("Christ Lay in Death's Prison"), his Passions, and on several occasions his *Easter Oratorio*. These were glorious occasions for all present.

Some of my most memorable Holy Week devotions have taken place in other churches. Let me name just two. Several years ago, Ruth and I had

17. Robert Greenberg, "Bach and the High Baroque" (Springfield, Va.: Teaching Company, 1998), audiotape.

the privilege of attending the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., on Palm Sunday. It was a beautiful spring day. The landscapes were resplendent with the cherry blossoms that gossamer our nation's capital during this season. Around the cathedral, tulips, daffodils, and crocuses were all in bloom. As we entered the cathedral along with other worshippers, we were given a strand of a palm frond. Palm branches have been used for centuries as symbols of joy and victory.

As the service began, the celebrant said, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord," and the congregation answered, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." There followed a reading of Christ's entry into Jerusalem from Luke. The celebrant said, "On this day Jesus Christ entered the holy city of Jerusalem in triumph, and was proclaimed as King of Kings by those who spread their garments and branches of palm along his way. Let these branches be for us signs of his victory, and grant that we who bear them in his name may ever hail him as our King, and follow him in the way that leads to eternal life." The celebrant again said, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," and the congregation, each holding our strand of palm on high, responded, "Hosanna in the highest."

The music that day, which focused on Palm Sunday, included the following hymns: "Procession of the Palms," "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" (the only hymn in the LDS hymnal specifically related to Palm Sunday), and the spiritual "Ride on!":

Ride on, king Jesus. No man can a-hinder me.
 He died for you and he died for me
 He died to set poor sinners free.
 He died for the rich and He died for the poor.
 He ain't come here to die no more.

After the hymn, the tone of the service shifted from joyful praise to somber contemplation as the darkening clouds of Holy Week began to gather. Now the words and music focused on Christ's betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. The Passion from Luke's gospel was read by Charles Robb, former governor and U.S. senator from Virginia, with various other voices representing Jesus, Peter, the chief priest, Pilate, and witnesses. The congregation represented the crowd. Thus, those of us who earlier had shouted "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,"

were now shouting, "Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!" and, "Crucify, crucify him!"

I must confess that these last words were difficult for me to say, but say them I did, and as I did so, I instantly assayed the measure of my devotion to the Lord. I wondered if I would have been among those who shouted him welcome the previous Sunday and then cried his death these few days later. It was a sober moment.

The service continued with Reverend Nathan Baxter, the dean of National Cathedral, delivering a sermon on the conflicting emotions between Palm Sunday and Good Friday, between the shouts of "Hosanna!" and "Crucify him!" Speaking of those ambivalent first disciples, he said, "We too are caught between the poles of devotion and disobedience, between praise and peccata, between wanting to welcome him into our lives and wanting also to crucify him." I looked up at the carved wooden statue of Christ hanging high at the crossing of the cathedral and was filled with remorse for those things I had done to add to His sorrow. I joined my prayer with that of Reverend Baxter: "Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross."

The service ended with choir and congregation singing "O Sacred Head, Sore Wounded" ("O Savior, Thou Who Wearest a Crown" in the LDS hymnal). I was particularly moved by the third verse, which is different from the one in the LDS hymnal:

What language shall I borrow to thank thee, dearest friend,
for this thy dying sorrow, thy pity without end?
Oh, make me thine forever! And should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never, outlive my love for thee.

Needless to say, this was a fitting way to begin the celebration of Holy Week. The spirit of that service echoed throughout the week, and still echoes during times of reflection about my bond with Christ.

The second experience took place three years ago on Easter Sunday when we had conference in our stake and my daughter, Julianna, and I attended services at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. It was a stunningly beautiful day, the sky a cerulean blue, the city sparkling like a giant dew-lit field lying below and beyond the cathedral itself, which sits on a hill. As

we approached the cathedral, we were stuck by how the stained glass windows bejeweled its massive gray walls.

As we entered the cathedral, we passed a labyrinth floor tapestry patterned after the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral, “a symbolic diagram of the pilgrim journey,” according to a pamphlet we picked up in the church, signifying the winding path to the center of the world, which is Christ. We took our seats and listened to the prelude music, organ renditions of “Offertoire pour le Jour de Pâques” by Jean-Francoise Dandrieu and “Christ lag in todesbanden” by Bach.

A few moments of silence were followed by three raps at the giant bronze Doors of Paradise at the front of the cathedral. The three raps startled me for a moment since I had heard three similar raps not long before in the Oakland Temple. I turned around to see the heavy doors, which are patterned after the famed doors by Lorenzo Ghiberti that hang on the Baptistry in Florence, swung open. Sunlight flooded the nave as the dean, chapter, and choir entered, singing the introit by Christopher Tye, accompanied by a brass ensemble and timpani:

“O who shall roll away the stone,”
the faithful women said;
“the heavy stone that seals the tomb,
and shuts us from our dead?”
But looking up, at dawn, they saw
the great stone rolled away,
And from the empty tomb a light
more dazzling than the day.

The choir and congregation together sang, “Jesus Christ Is Risen Today,” with its repeated alleluias. Following scripture readings from the Old and New Testaments, respectively, William E. Swing, the Episcopal Bishop of California, delivered the sermon. He spoke of a recent murder in Johannesburg and of the murderer’s refusal to see his victims and their families as real people because he saw them as through a telescope. He said, “It is hard to see humanity through a telescopic lens.” He then spoke of Paul’s inability to see Christ until he was “blinded by the resurrection” on the road to Damascus. He concluded his sermon by saying, “Easter has everything to do with a new way of seeing. The angel at the tomb said to the women, ‘Look!’ The last word was no word at all, but an empty tomb.”

In the Episcopal Church, Easter Sunday is a day of renewal of baptismal vows, so following the bishop's sermon, all who wished to, reaffirmed their denunciation of sin and recommitted themselves to Christ. This reaffirmation of their discipleship took the form of answers to a series of questions, including the following:

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

I will, with God's help.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

I will, with God's help.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

I will, with God's help.

May Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and bestowed upon us the forgiveness of sins, keep us in eternal life by his grace, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

As I listened to these questions and tried to answer them honestly, I felt a renewal of my bond with Christ in an expanded way, felt anew the purifying waters of baptism wash over my soul.

The service continued with the Eucharist or sacrament, additional musical numbers by the choir and congregation, the bishop's blessing of the congregation, and, as we walked out into the spring sunshine, the organist playing Widor's great *Toccata*.

Needless to say, I was filled with the Spirit during and after this service. My heart was full of praise. I felt like Joseph Smith who described his feeling after the First Vision, "My soul was filled with love and for many days I could rejoice with great Joy."¹⁸

I am aware of the fact that these were unusual Palm Sunday and Easter services and that they took place in churches with a professional clergy and many of the trappings of large, wealthy, urban churches. While such services can be dramatically appealing, it isn't necessary to celebrate Holy Week in such grand style. Some of my most memorable Holy Week experiences have taken place in simple, humble church services, including Latter-day Saint services where as Christians we gathered to center our lives on Christ and to renew our devotion to him. What is important for

18. "History, 1832," in *Personal Writings*, 6.

Latter-day Saints, I believe, is that we should elevate the significance of Holy Week and expand and deepen our ways of expressing praise and devotion to our Lord during the season that marks his triumph over sin and death. The seeds of such worship exist both in the primitive church and in the first years of the Restoration. Perhaps it is time that we allowed them to flower among us.

I pray for the day when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recognizes the full significance of Holy Week, when honoring Christ's suffering and death as well as his resurrection becomes more important than stake or general conference, celebrating the restoration of the priesthood, or remembering the coming of the pioneers into the Salt Lake Valley. I don't want to be misunderstood: I value these important events of the Restoration, just as I value being instructed and inspired by modern prophets in conference; but my ultimate commitment is to Jesus Christ whose sacrifice and resurrection have imparadised my heart and whose amazing grace has set me free.

I have always seen the Restoration as an ongoing process, not as a series of events that happened 170 years ago. I believe it is a process which continues to this day. Anyone with eyes open knows that we need continuing restoration as well as continuing revelation. I respectfully submit that observance of Holy Week, at least to the extent it was practiced in the primitive church, is one of the things that awaits our preparation.