



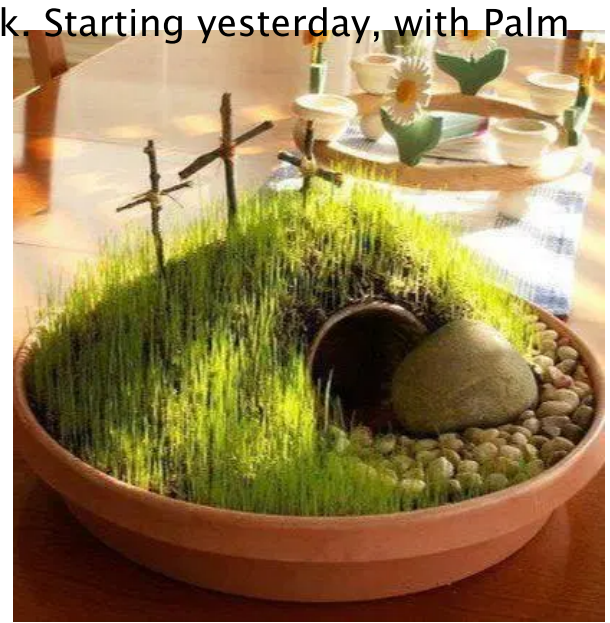
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## The Building is Empty But So is The Grave (COVID-19 Update, 04/06/20)

Posted On: April 7, 2020

This week for a majority of Christendom is Holy Week. Starting yesterday, with Palm Sunday (a celebration of the triumphal entry), and ending seven days later with Easter Sunday (a celebration of the resurrection), Holy Week has a significance for many Christians. This week also marks the Passover (Pesach) and the Feast of Unleavened Bread which also has a significance for not just Jews but for many Christians as well. The recent pandemic crisis has brought these celebrations to an upheaval. How does this affect Seventh Day Baptists and our churches? Hopefully, I can provide some food for thought about how we go about our celebrations during this season of your church's life.



Seventh Day Baptists have a wide range of beliefs and practices when it comes to the celebration of the resurrection and communion. There are some churches who do not shy away from the use of the word Easter (it is in the King James Version after all). Some wouldn't use the word if you paid them to. Some celebrate that Saturday (Sabbath) was the actual day of the resurrection during that Holy Week. Some only celebrate communion once a year close to Passover. All Seventh Day Baptists believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and in the power of the work that He accomplished on the cross for mankind. All Seventh Day Baptists believe in commemorating that final Passover meal of Jesus and His death and resurrection until He returns again.

Our churches and pastors across the United States, Canada, and Mexico have responded to increasing COVID-19 restrictions with admirable flexibility and creativity.\* In our recent pastor forums led by our Executive Director, Carl Greene, there were reports of drive-in services, online streaming services, pre-recorded services, and video conferencing for Bible study. Aslan is still on the move! God is at work and Seventh Day Baptists understand that this is not a time to retreat away from the frontlines of darkness but rather a time to actively advance God's Kingdom. You cannot quarantine the hand of God!

However, amid this time of uncertainty and change, one question looms for many of us this week especially: what do we do for our Easter/Resurrection/Passover services and celebrations?

Here are some practical suggestions for your church:

1. Consider postponing the celebration you would have had this week until you can meet in person again. This is a date that moves every year. Waiting would not only allow for the ordinances (baptism and communion) that you would normally celebrate to be done in their normal way and also allows for you to invite others to join you for in-person community and the gospel that people will be desperate for. It is okay to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus every Sabbath.
2. Consider doing a special event (if local health regulations permit) such as a drive-in church. Get an FM transmitter and people can participate together yet separately.
3. Consider focusing on a different aspect of Holy Week than you normally would for the benefit of your congregation. Host a virtual messianic Passover Seder. Have a Maundy Thursday or Good Friday service. Focus on the solemnity of Holy Saturday. Go to a local park and have a service with the sunrise in the background and be the first witness to the resurrection for that day.

4. Consider putting together a special Resurrection Sabbath box (communion elements, bulletin, jump drives with songs, activities for kids, etc.) that people could drive by and pick up at the church building (using appropriate distancing protocols) or could be delivered to the congregation to prepare them for the churches activities together.
5. Consider teaching families how to do a family worship and provide resources for them to use (not just on Sabbath but on other days through the week). Lots of families have a break from their busy schedule during this time. Use it to help them learn skills (devotions, prayer, etc.) that will benefit them and that they won't want to give up when their schedule normalizes.
6. Look backward from the future. When this pandemic is over, how will your church have wanted to celebrate?

Above all, you should pray. Ask God for wisdom. Jesus is still the head of the Church, and he is leading his people during this time. We often run the risk of finding an idea and implementing it without considering if it is how God is leading *our* local church. Take time to consult with your leadership and people. Local ideas and solutions are often the most effective. God has you exactly where He has you for such a time as this. None of this has taken God by surprise, and the Church has been given unique opportunities. Pray over these ideas and use them as a launch point for brainstorming with your team. This could be one of the most memorable Easter services in your church's history. Do you feel overwhelmed and behind the curve? We all do, and perhaps it is exactly where God wants us. That means we are more aware of our dependence on him. God has a knack for developing big things out of improbable circumstances. Let's pray for what he will do through this one. Let's learn to celebrate together separately in the way that glorifies God the most!

\*We recommend that all of our congregations observe local health regulations in all activities out of submission to authority and love for your neighbor.

#### ADDENDUM CONCERNING THE LORD'S SUPPER

*We believe that the Lord's Supper commemorates the suffering and death of our Redeemer until He comes, and is a symbol of union in Christ and a pledge of renewed allegiance to our risen Lord.* – Seventh Day Baptist Statement of Belief on The Lord's Supper

#### What Does the Bible Say?

In times like this, we are all grateful for the dysfunction of the church in Corinth. Had they not been wrong on just about everything, we would be much the poorer in our ecclesiology today. Thankfully, the church in Corinth was far from the mark with respect to communion. Paul wrote to correct their errors and abuses in 1 Corinthians 11. His rebuke and redirection may be summarized as follows and as a guide for us in participating and administering the Lord's Supper in today's times:

#### 1. Communion must take place in a context of unity.

Paul was concerned that the church's practice of communion did not obscure its theology of communion. If communion is to be a celebration of our union with God through faith in Christ and our union in covenant with one another, then it should not be celebrated in an atmosphere of division or seclusion. He makes that point in 1 Corinthians 11:18–20 [📖](#).

Therefore, the METHODS that are used – even in a time of crisis – should in no way contradict or obscure the essential MEANING of communion.

#### 2. Communion must take place in an atmosphere of order, love and equality.

It appears as if communion originally took place as a “liturgical course” inside an actual meal, which may or may not have been known as “The Love Feast”. At some point during the meal (think church supper) the pastor would stand and say: “Now, on the night he was betrayed...” thus leading the group through the liturgical aspect of the meal, with appropriate decorum and reflection. That was the intention – but the Corinthian practice fell far short of that ideal. (1 Corinthians 11:21–22 📖)

When contemplating new ways of facilitating communion during a crisis, we must consider issues of order, love, and equality. Will all eat at the same time? What if some are watching later? How is communion connected to the care of the congregation?

### 3. Communion must take place in an atmosphere of self-examination and repentance.

In 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 📖), Paul provides some positive instruction largely based on what became Luke’s version of the Last Supper. Immediately following that he gave a stern warning against thoughtless or unworthy participation. Even in crisis, these warnings should be heeded and understood by all potential participants.

The blessing of our Baptist understanding of the Lord’s Supper is that it is symbolic. The elements used are not literal blood and body. The elements are symbols of blood and body. This gives us some freedom in our expression of communion while being guided from 1 Corinthians 11.

Some possible options during this time for celebration of the Lord’s Supper as a covenant community:

1. Postpone celebrating the Lord’s Supper until your covenant community can be together physically.
2. Have a drive-thru communion (if the local health regulations permit) where on the same day and in the same way people may participate.
3. Have an online service in which people can on the same day, in the same way, and at the same time participate.

Side Notes: a. You can allow them to choose their own elements.

1. You can deliver elements to their home.
2. You can provide a recipe for communion bread.

Tags: communion, Coronavirus, covid-19, Lord's Supper

Category: Church Development, Church News, Conference News, Council on Ministry, Pastoral Services, SDB Exec Blog, SDB News

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## Sabbath Recorder – April 2020:

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- Bringing The Back
- PULSE
- The Love of God

## Resources

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- **Resolution on Child Protection (SDB General Council)** [Read More](#)
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