

Multisensory Worship Service for Holy Thursday

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Introduction: The services of Holy Week are inherently dramatic and lend themselves to multisensory experiences. In fact, you would almost have to work at making them anything but multisensory. See, for example, all the services contained in *The United Methodist Book of Worship (UMBOW)*, 338-376.

Since *The United Methodist Book of Worship (UMBOW)* contains a thorough, planned order of service for Holy Thursday, I am posting suggested resources for a multisensory service for Holy Thursday.

(Some churches may want to add electronic/digital resources or include storytelling in the service for Holy Thursday. What follows are suggestions that may stimulate your congregation's planning. *(A note of caution: Don't use everything that is here just because it is here. Use or adapt it as it meets the needs and resources your congregation finds useful in worshipping God for this holy night.)*)

I suggest that you scan down this page to get a quick overview of what is here before you read it in detail.

Theme or Focus: Strange and Familiar Food Stories

This picks up Passover-Lord's Supper-footwashing: A cluster of narratives all connected to eating, caring, and loving gestures.

Scriptures:

- **Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10), 11-14:** God tells Moses how to prepare for the original Passover meal
- **1 Corinthians 11:23-26:** Paul tells of the institution of the Lord's Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me."
- **John 13:1-17, 31b-35:** Knowing that his hour had come, Jesus washed the disciples' feet and gave them a new commandment: "Love one another . . . as I have loved you."

Graphic: I created this main graphic (above, left) and the second graphic (below) with a digital camera. These may be inserted into a *PowerPoint* presentation. Select the picture with your mouse and save it to your hard drive. If you save the picture in your picture file, you should be able to select the picture and insert it as background for your *PowerPoint* slides.

Set up:

Arrange space for three scenes; Place spotlights to focus on the three "stages":

1. Door posts and storyteller (stage left)
2. Paul at a table writing of the tradition of the Supper and a narrator reading what Paul is writing (stage right)



3. Enactment of John's telling of the footwashing (center stage)

Drama:

Scene 1: Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10), 11-14. Set — Door posts with a screen between them.

Options:

- Show a clip from the *Prince of Egypt* or some other video that portrays the application of the blood to the lintels/doorposts of the house to give a visual sense of the action.
- Present the Scripture as a narrator/storyteller giving instructions — as God told Moses what to do. As background, create or find a video segment of a fire with an animal being roasted over it. Since families are to be involved, this should be suggestive more than realistic. The purpose here is to give a strong visual effect.

In either case, end the scene by marking the doorposts with fingers dipped in red paint.

To add to the multisensory dimension, you could have the storyteller pass out baskets of roasted lamb or some meat to be "lamb" for all to eat. You might want to use unleavened bread instead.

The musicians begin to play "I Will Call Upon the Lord" (*The Faith We Sing*, 2002); and all join in.

Scene 2: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Paul is seated at the table, writing. An unseen reader speaks the words of the text. Props include a table, oil lamp, pen, and parchment.

Scene 3: John 13:1-17, 31b-35: Dramatic enactment with a narrator, Jesus, Peter, several others to be the other disciples.

Props and arrangement: A low table with the disciples reclining around it, some glasses of drink and some small bowls. The disciples are seated with their backs and feet toward the congregation. Also have a towel, pitcher and basin; necessary undergarment and outer robe for Jesus.

The script would be the John text, slightly adapted for this dramatic enactment.

Order of Service

Entrance

Gathering. *The people enter and take their seats. The room is semidark. The Communion Table is illuminated, but the candles are not lit. The oil lamp on the table (stage right) is lit.*

Greeting:

The leader greets people in a way consistent with the practice of the congregation, such as:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

*And the people responding: **And also with you.***

Then the leader continues with these or similar words:

Tonight we continue our journey to the cross,

remembering where our table manners came from.
Tonight we tell the stories that make us God's people.
Tonight we are a people about to be freed from slavery.
Tonight we are a people who come with dirty feet
and become clean by water and the word.

Song: *The Faith We Sing*, 2254, "In Remembrance of Me"

Confession and Pardon

Let us declare our need of forgiveness and cleansing.

**Jesus, our feet are dirty from the journey.
We have not loved one another as you have loved us.
Callousness and violence stain our hearts and lives.
How will we become clean again?
We see the table there,
but who will make us clean and ready for the meal?
Where will we find water for these soiled soles?
Restore us to the joy of God's salvation.
Amen.**

(A solo voice begins to sing "O Lamb of God," United Methodist Hymnal, 30. All may join in singing or simply listen.)

The leader says to the people:
The lamb of God takes away the sins of the world.
Believe the good news.
In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

The people say to the leader:
In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

All say:
Glory to God. Amen.

Proclamation and Response

Prayer for Illumination
Scene I (see above)

Song: "I Will Call Upon the Lord," *The Faith We Sing*, 2002

Scene II (see above)

Song: "In Remembrance of Me," *The Faith We Sing*, 2254 (stanza one)

Scene III (see above)

Sermon: *Here an elder or deacon preaches out of the experience of the Scriptures. This is not a "three-point and poem" occasion! It is a moment to move the action toward the response of footwashing to follow. The sermon should be brief, perhaps sharing some table story that connects to how life is changed when food is prepared and shared with story and memory. The invitation is to live in love for one another by enacting the word in acts of mercy — in following Jesus' example by washing one another's feet.*

Footwashing: *See the rubrical instructions in The United Methodist Book of Worship, 351. Be sure that people are clear that they are free to simply observe the action if they choose. Also be sure that children are encouraged and supported in participating if they would like to do so. Footwashing can be a very powerful sensory experience for all who receive and give the gift of footwashing. Have teams of helpers to empty basins; bring fresh, warm, soapy water; and provide plenty of towels.*

Musicians play and lead the congregation in singing while the footwashing takes place.

*United Methodist Hymnal, 432, "Jesu, Jesu"
The Faith We Sing, 2176, "Make Me a Servant"*

Concerns and Prayers: *Here a leader engages the people in prayers for the world, for all who suffer and are in trouble, and for the church. PowerPoint slides evocative of various biddings to prayer might be used. For example, if the people will be asked to remember those engaged in war, slides of deployed service personnel or of Palestinian or Iraqi children might be shown.*

The Passing of the Peace *(as the congregation is accustomed to doing this):
This may be omitted to simplify the service.*

Offering

Thanksgiving and Communion

Taking the Bread and Cup

The Great Thanksgiving and the Lord's Prayer

(The presider leads the prayer, using pages 64-65 in The United Methodist Book of Worship. Preferably, he or she leads the prayer with gestures and a storytelling style rather than simply reading it. The congregation joins the prayer following "Musical Setting D" in The United Methodist Hymnal, pages 23-24.)

Breaking the Bread

Giving the Bread and Cup

During this time, the congregation is led in singing songs familiar to the people, such as "Amazing Grace," "Let Us Break Bread Together," and so on.

The pastor and people give thanks after Communion, using "Prayer after Communion" in the hymnal or an extemporaneous prayer.

Sending Forth

Stripping of the Church (*See the introduction to the service on page 351, The United Methodist Book of Worship.*)

This action enacts the desolation and abandonment of the long night in Gethsemane and what followed.

All the props for the service are also moved out, and the light is dimmed to provide just enough light for people to see and move safely from the room. Children and youth should be prepared to share in this task.

The church remains bare until the Easter Vigil, when the process is reversed.

During the stripping of the church one or more of the following acts may be done:

- This may be done in silence.
- Psalm 22 (*United Methodist Hymnal*, 752) may be read by a solo voice or by the congregation.
- Read Mark 14:26-42.
- Sing 2110, "Why Has God Forsaken Me," *The Faith We Sing* (introduced by a flute or an oboe) A solo voice sings stanza 1; women sing stanza 2; men sing stanza 3; all sing stanza 4. When people are not singing, they sing on a drone note. The lead musician guides them in singing the drone note. This hymn may be unfamiliar to your congregation, but it is a powerful and mysterious anticipation of Good Friday.

Dismissal with Blessing

A leader says these or similar words with fitting gesture:

Go in peace.

May Jesus Christ, who for our sake became obedient to God
and gave himself to death on the cross,
keep you this night and forever.

Amen.

Going Forth: *All leave in silence.*

This service was found at

<http://www.gbod.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=nhLRJ2PMKsG&b=5689567&ct=3834835>
(January 2012).