



***For use in this time of sheltering in place
as people are not able to gather in community for Holy Communion***

Note from Dr. Marcia: Friends, this brief ritual is offered as a way of “breaking bread” on a week that would “normally” involve Holy Communion while we are “sheltered in place” and not able to physically gather together. Not all denominations are comfortable with utilizing a communion prayer and distribution of elements outside of the context of in-person worship. The following is not meant to be a bonafide “Love Feast” format (as John Wesley popularized in early American worship) because it is not a full service as such a Love Feast would be. Rather this ritual is meant to be inserted into your Sunday worship and is a way to recall Jesus’ wider table ministry and break and share comfort and love in such a manner that people do not feel deprived of “gathering at the table” while physically separated. To help create the sense that this is not a “communion substitute” at home, I would urge leaders in the worship space to not use what looks like your typical communion bread and cup but instead set the “table” in your worship space to resemble our at-home tables, with breakfast and coffee/tea/orange juice. If you have a few people leading via livestream and you are able to be at a distance around the table in your worship space, pull up some chairs/stools around it to extend the metaphor of early agape table/meals.

As always with materials from the Worship Design Studio, please adapt in whatever way is helpful to you. You may use and share freely in person and livestream and a mention of www.worshipdesignstudio.com/series in your description credits is always appreciated! My prayers are with you.

- Dr. Marcia McFee (contact me at marcia@marciamcfee.com)

“COMFORT FOOD: A FEAST OF LOVE”

Begin with an invitational segue related to the scripture/proclamation of the day. If there is a familiar and brief refrain to invite people to sing along at home, ask them to use the singing time to get something to eat, pour a fresh cup of coffee, gather at a table, etc.

When we “break bread” together as a church in our worship, we remember that Jesus invited folks to his table as part of his ministry, not just at the Last Supper. So we wanted to create a way for all of us to break bread together with whatever we have at our homes. Indeed, what we’ve asked you to do is to prepare your favorite “comfort food!”

I invite you to share with the group gathered online what food you are bringing to the table for our virtual feast. *[directions for sharing in chat/via photos in comments on a FB page/one at a time in Zoom if you are a small gathering. If you can, repeat what you see in the chat aloud to gather and share the responses]*

Jesus used the parable of a great banquet to which all people are invited in order to talk about what the “kin-dom” of God, the family of God, looks like. He said, “Go to the highways and back alleys and *urge* people to come in so that my house will be filled.” He often invited the most unlikely guests to his meal-times, confounding the disciples. In this way, he was encouraging a deep love and connection beyond social norms. He knew that we humans need connection and inclusion. Jesus comforts us, saying “you have a place at the table” and Jesus challenges us to make sure we are doing the same—that all people know they are welcome in our hearts, in our homes, in our churches—even if we can’t physically be with each other right now.

It is difficult in this moment not to be near some of the people we love and might be worried about. Take a moment and say out loud *[or in chat/comments]* the names of people you wish were right there next to you at your table today.

[pause and allow people a minute to do so; you may want to add specific names of people in your community at this moment who are sick]

Jesus is no longer physically on earth, yet every time we gather around a table and we call him to mind, he is present with us in Spirit. And so too, our loved ones are with us. Let this be a comfort to us.

We also want to call to mind, the people we cannot name, whose names we do not know. But we know they need our prayers and God's comfort.

For those who have lost loved ones
For those who are sick and recovering
For those who are caring for loved ones who are sick at home
For those who are caring for persons in medical care
For those who are separated from loved ones
For those who are feeling alone and isolated
For those who are helping and are so very tired
For those who are struggling to find friends, food, and comfort
For those who are afraid

[add other categories as feels right for your context]

I invite you to take a deep breath on behalf of all those we do not know and cannot call by name. As we do so, we know that God knows who needs our prayers and the Spirit, Breath of God, is blowing from within us outward as a Spirit of Compassion and Presence. *[pause to take a couple of deep and audible breaths]*

Blessings at the table are part of our Judeo-Christian heritage. Indeed, Jesus adapted his Jewish ritual blessing spoken before and after meals. He asked us to remember him whenever we break bread and raise a cup in thanksgiving. *[Leader pulls close a plate of food and cup of coffee/tea]* This is why we call our communion prayers the "Great Thanksgiving." In this feast of love and comfort, we can call to mind things for which we are deeply grateful. I invite you to speak aloud a couple of things that you are grateful for in this moment. *[pause to allow this]*

And so I invite you to raise a plate of "something" on your table, or a glass of whatever you are drinking, *[give folks a moment to do this]* and let us bless it in this way, repeating after me there at home:

Holy Comforter

Holy Comforter *[continue to repeat the next lines in this way]*

We gather in your name...

invited by Jesus...

bound together with your Spirit...

in union with each other...

Feed our bodies and our spirits...
with your comforting presence...
so that we might be your comfort to others...

Bless this food...
and break open our hearts...
Bless this drink...
and pour out your love...
Amen...

As you pass and fill your plates, getting ready to continue to eat your comfort food once we have signed off, I invite you to imagine what extravagant love looks like as you reach across the social distance to loved ones, to friends, and even acquaintances or strangers.

[You could include an invitation to some discussion at the table based on the theme of your worship/scripture/sermon/music you have shared that morning...]

And now may you shelter not only in place, but in peace. May the peace and comfort of Christ be present with you now and forevermore. Amen.

Join me on a webinar, Tuesday, March 24, at 9am about creating Holy Week and Easter worship for social distancing as well as a look at a worship series called “The Heart of the Matter” from Worship Design Studio for the Easter Season (based on lectionary readings, Year A, and adapted for our COVID-context). If you cannot be on live, I will send you a recording. Register [HERE](#)