

A HOLY WEEK PRACTICE

The Labyrinth Walk

A guide for walking the ancient path outdoors

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

What Is a Labyrinth?

A labyrinth is not a maze. A maze is a puzzle designed to confuse — full of dead ends and wrong turns. A labyrinth has only one path. It winds inward toward the center and then back out again. There is no way to get lost. You simply walk.

People have walked labyrinths for centuries as a form of prayer. The path folds back on itself, doubling and curving, so that you may find yourself very close to the center and then suddenly moving away from it again. This is intentional. It mirrors the way we move through life and through faith: rarely in a straight line, often circling back, arriving at the center in ways we did not expect.

During Holy Week, the labyrinth becomes a particular kind of companion. The winding path holds the whole arc of the week — from the noise of Palm Sunday to the silence of Holy Saturday to the light that breaks on Easter morning. You do not have to carry the whole story in your mind as you walk. Let your feet do some of the praying.

PREPARATION

Arriving at the Labyrinth

Before you step onto the path, take a moment to arrive. You may have come from a busy morning, a difficult conversation, a long drive. Give yourself permission to leave all of that at the entrance.

Stand at the threshold — the opening of the labyrinth — and take three slow breaths. With each breath, let something go: a worry, a hurry, an expectation about what this walk should feel like.

You might hold a simple intention as you enter. Not a goal, but an openness. Something like:

AN INTENTION FOR THE WALK

“I am here. I am open. Lead me where I need to go.”

Or simply: “I come to listen.”

There is no correct pace. Some people walk slowly. Some stop and stand for a while. Some find that tears come unexpectedly. All of this is welcome. The labyrinth holds whatever you bring to it.

If others are walking when you arrive, you may pass them gently or step aside to let them pass. There is no disruption in a labyrinth — only fellow travelers on the same path.

THE WALK

Three Movements of the Path

The labyrinth walk has traditionally been understood in three movements. You do not need to track them precisely — they are not marked on the path. But you may find them arising naturally as you walk.

The first movement: releasing

As you walk the outer paths inward, this is a time of letting go. The winding of the path will bring you close to the center and then carry you away again. Notice what rises in you during these turns — what you are carrying that you might set down.

The disciples entered Holy Week carrying their own hopes and fears about who Jesus was and what he would do. We enter carrying ours. This part of the walk is an invitation to loosen your grip on what you expected — of this walk, of this week, of God.

QUESTIONS FOR THE INWARD WALK

What am I carrying into this week that feels heavy?

What expectation of God am I holding that might need to soften?

Where in my life am I close to the center of something — and then suddenly far away again?

The second movement: receiving

When you reach the center of the labyrinth, pause. Stay as long as you need to. This is the still point of the walk.

In the ancient practice, the center of the labyrinth represents the presence of God — the place of arrival, of illumination, of rest. You have not earned your way here. The path simply brought you. Receive whatever is offered in the stillness: a word, an image, a sense of being held, perhaps nothing at all. Nothing is also a gift.

During Holy Week, the center may hold the weight of Good Friday or the hush of Holy Saturday. It may hold the first light of Easter. Let it hold whatever needs holding.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CENTER

What does it feel like to simply arrive — not because I earned it, but because the path led me here?

What is God offering me in this stillness?

Is there something I need to receive that I have been refusing?

The third movement: returning

The path out follows the same course as the path in, but something has changed. You have been to the center. The walk outward is traditionally a time of integration — of carrying what you received back into the world.

Notice whether your pace changes on the way out. Notice what feels different, if anything. The disciples who walked out of the upper room on Maundy Thursday went into the night changed by what they had received, even if they could not yet name it. Mary walked away from the empty tomb carrying a name spoken just for her. We walk outward carrying something, whether we can name it or not.

QUESTIONS FOR THE OUTWARD WALK

What am I taking back with me from the center?

How might I walk differently in the coming days because of this?

Whose image do I bear — and how will I show it?

WHEN YOU RETURN TO THE THRESHOLD

A Closing Prayer

When you step off the labyrinth path and back into the ordinary world, you may use this prayer to close your walk. You can pray it silently, whisper it, or simply hold it in mind as you turn to leave.

*God of the winding path,
I did not walk in a straight line.
I circled back. I came close and moved away.
I arrived at a center I did not build.*

*This week is the same.
I do not always understand the turns.
I do not always know how close I am to the center
or how far the path will carry me before I return.*

*But there is only one path.
And it is yours.
And I am not lost.*

*I bear your image. I carry your name.
Send me back into the world with open hands.*

Amen.

A NOTE FOR OUTDOOR WALKERS

The World as Part of the Prayer

Walking a labyrinth outdoors means that the created world becomes part of your prayer. The wind may change direction as you turn. The light may shift. You may hear birds, or traffic, or children playing nearby. None of this is a distraction. It is participation.

Pay attention to what you notice on the path. A stone underfoot. The temperature of the air. The sound that rises when everything goes quiet. These are not interruptions to the contemplative experience — they are the contemplative experience.

If you find yourself walking during Holy Week near water — a lake, a river, a shore — allow it to hold the full arc of the story: the depth of Friday, the stillness of Saturday, the first light breaking on Sunday morning.

You need not force any of this into meaning. Simply walk. Simply notice. God is already here, in the turning of the path and the turning of the earth.

*May your walking be a prayer,
and may you know yourself held by the One
who walks every path with us.*

Pastor Becky Sundquist