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# The Finish Line Is In View

## *Pandemic Easter Round Two*

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By Caleb Hennington

Digital Content Editor



We all remember Easter 2020. Only a month after the first confirmed case of COVID was found in Arkansas, many of our churches were wondering how in the world they were

going to be able to safely have their annual Easter celebrations.

We were told various things in those first few weeks of the pandemic: everything is under control, we are beating this virus, we'll all be able to gather again by the time Easter Sunday comes around.

Unfortunately, most of those early statements were tragically misinformed and naive. Now, one year later, we realize that the pandemic was much bigger than any of us expected it to be.

And yet, our churches did find ways to celebrate Holy Week and Easter in 2020. Some churches had the infrastructure already in place to pivot to virtual worship services; others had to figure it out from scratch. Some churches figured out how to take their worship services outside, or in the parking lot, with cars tuned to specific radio stations to hear the pastor's message; others gathered outside in small groups to have Bible study.

As Bishop Mueller has mentioned before, and coming from a member of the Conference Center for Communication team, we are so very proud of the way churches stepped out and made sure that Easter wasn't canceled, but instead, celebrated in a safe and, still, deeply meaningful way.

Now, it's almost Easter once again. But this year, things are different. This year, we are better prepared for the reality of a scaled-back Easter service. We're better prepared for live streaming, recorded services, and virtual small group discussions.

This year, we have a vaccine that is stopping the virus from spreading and keeping our friends and loved ones safe from hospitalizations and even death. The sense of relief that another tool to fight the virus brings to every one of us cannot be overstated. It's like finally seeing the finish line after running the most drawn-out marathon in history.

On the day that this column publishes, it will be Maundy Thursday. As anyone who has celebrated Holy Week can tell you, Maundy Thursday is a day where we remember the Last Supper in Luke chapter 22, when Jesus gathered the disciples together to break bread and drink wine, and give them a final lesson before his ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

I can imagine many of the disciples were frightened and uncertain about the future of the world that night. Not only did Jesus let them know that this was his last night with them, but he had also just told them that one of them at the table would betray him that night. Talk about creating an uncomfortable family dinner conversation!

But the story of Holy Week, thankfully, does not end on Maundy Thursday. Just as Jesus and his disciples faced a dark and uncertain future before his crucifixion, we also continue to face a dark and uncertain future when it comes to the pandemic.

But there is light at the end of the tunnel. We can see the finish line — this time, we can be more certain of it — and it's not too far ahead of us now. Easter follows Maundy Thursday

and Good Friday, and that should give us all hope in the coming year. I pray that we remember that hope as we finish another unusual, but powerful and inspiring, Easter Sunday.

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