

Entrance into Jerusalem

Planning

Lectionary Bible readings

Palm Sunday: Palm procession
RCL Year C, Psalm 118.1-2, 19-29,
Luke 19.28-40

Theme Towards Jerusalem

Luke describes Jesus setting his face to Jerusalem. Over seven weeks we travel with Jesus on his journey from the Mount of Transfiguration to the glory of the cross. Read more about the theme on page 1 and in *Month by month* on the [WEB](#).

Week 7 of 7

Entrance into Jerusalem

Luke 19.28-40

On Palm Sunday we enter Jerusalem with Jesus, the king of peace.

This week provides an opportunity to:

- identify what is distinctive about Luke's account of the entry into Jerusalem
- recognise that Jesus is the king of peace
- hold up the cross as the focus of our prayer.

A Bible study worksheet on this reading, suitable for midweek groups, is available on the [WEB](#).

Resources for exploring the Passion readings, which may be used on occasions throughout Holy Week, are on pp.20-21 with further material on the [WEB](#).

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Week by week

Bible notes
Prayers
PostScript: up-to-the minute comment
Bible study worksheet
Children's Sheet
Further resources
Drama sketches
Sermon notes on a different Bible reading
Links to other materials for this week's readings

Hyperlinks, full details of books and footnotes are in *Further resources* on the [WEB](#).

Gather

Prepare the space

Refresh your signpost from last week to say 'The Gates of Jerusalem'. Give out palm crosses to everyone as they arrive (see [WEB](#)).

Gathering words

Today, on Palm Sunday, we arrive at the gates of Jerusalem. We have arrived at our destination and prepare to enter the city of dreams. We have travelled Luke's road to get here and we enter with his perspective. What will we find?

Open the Word

Bible notes

Psalm 118.1-2, 19-29

This processional psalm may belong to the Feast of Tabernacles, when olive branches were used, though it also celebrates a victory. The section omitted by the lectionary talks of a royal victory, when enemies were destroyed and the king, with God's help, has succeeded against all odds. We have to imagine the singers approaching the gates of the Temple, with a choir singing the leader's part and the people singing the responses, 'His steadfast love endures for ever' and 'In the name of the Lord I cut them off'. The phrase about 'the stone that the builders rejected' looks as though it was once a proverb, used in the original to refer to a leader whom people had wrongly written off, but eventually to become very important as Christians sought to make sense of Jesus' death. Verse 25, 'O save us' is, in shortened form, 'Hosanna'. This psalm provides several of the features of the traditional Palm Sunday that Luke explicitly rejects.

Gospel Luke 19.28-40

This year we have Palm Sunday without palms or hosannas! Luke omits any mention of branches being strewn on the road, only garments. The disciples put Jesus on the colt; it is their decision to proclaim him as king, not something he grasps for himself. Luke also makes clear it is only Jesus' disciples – though quite a crowd of them, not just the Twelve – who are cheering Jesus on, and adds the detail that the crucial moment begins as they descend from the Mount of Olives. Finally, the words of their praise differ from Mark and Matthew: not 'Hosanna in the highest!' but 'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'

What does this tell us of how Luke understands the event? It tells us that he wants to minimise the nationalistic, rebellious elements of the event and emphasise its message of peace. So the branches, with their echo of the Maccabean revolt, have to go, and the acclamation 'Hosanna' – fairly meaningless to Luke's Gentile readers – is replaced with the word 'peace'.

Luke will have to explain why it is that this peaceful Jesus dies a rebel's death. In fact his Jesus is deeply subversive. The kind of peace Jesus wants, with the insiders and outsiders changing places and a radical sharing of wealth among deserving and undeserving alike, doesn't look much like the Pax Romana, which was all about protecting privilege. Tacitus once commented on the brutality of the Pax Romana: 'they create a desolation and they call it peace'.

Luke's readers may also have drawn a contrast between Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and that of a Roman triumph, when a victorious general rode in procession into Rome driving the defeated enemy commander in chains before him. The climax was when the enemy was publicly strangled. By contrast, when Jesus enters it is the hero who is riding to his death.

Limiting the welcoming party to Jesus' disciples removes the inexplicable fickleness of the crowd seen in the traditional understanding of Palm Sunday – 'Sometimes they strew his way...then "crucify" is all on their breath'. In Luke, those who bay for Jesus' blood are not the ones who welcomed him as messiah.

The Gates of Jerusalem

Entrance into Jerusalem

Towards Jerusalem Week 7

The psalm, which has clearly influenced most gospel writers, belongs to a triumphal entry. Luke, on the other hand, presents the entry of Jesus as an anti-triumph, without palm branches, without hosannas, without everything. Luke's account is more a parody of a triumph than a triumph, just as for him victory will ironically be to hang obediently on a cross and die. The two approaches have continued to vie with one another down the centuries: Christian triumphalism has contrasted with Christian humility. The eighth-century Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood*¹ (see [WEB](#) for link) harmonises them by imagining Jesus as a warrior hero whose bravery is shown by freely mounting the cross and refusing to smite the enemies who nail him there.

Q Do Luke's variations on this story weaken or strengthen it?

Q Can 'Peace' and 'O save us' mean the same thing?

Sermon ideas

- Don't forget *PostScript* on the [WEB](#): up-to-the-minute comment available on Thursday morning.
- Jesus is welcomed into Jerusalem as the king, and the challenge of today's reading is that we should welcome him into our lives as king too. But what kind of a king?
- A king who does not reveal everything at once (vv.29-34). The colt had clearly

been pre-arranged, but the two disciples are not party to the arrangements. They have to be instructed what to do, and must trust that Jesus has the plan worked out. Jesus doesn't reveal all his plans to us. We must trust and obey.

- A king who comes in the name of the Lord (v.38). The Old Testament uses 'name' as a way of speaking of the essence, presence or power of someone. Jesus is recognised as bringing the focus and action of God.
- Hence...a king who has performed miracles (v.37). The New Testament does not subscribe to the deist view of God – the divine watchmaker who made the world, wound it up, and set it off to run solely by its own internal mechanism. Instead Christianity is theist. God gets involved in his world by changing things, and Jesus as his agent has shown actions that cannot be explained solely by science.
- A king of peace (v.38). 'Hosanna' would mean that Jesus would use his power to bring salvation (deliverance from Roman rule) to the nation – but the salvation Jesus will bring, his suffering and death, will be entirely different. Luke reports cries of 'Peace' instead to make this point.
- A king who accepts praise (v.40). Christian worship seems on one level deeply self-contradictory, for how can it matter to God or make any practical difference in the world that we sing songs of praise? But, as Jesus accepted the perfume last week, he accepts the praise this week, and says, moreover, that

the people are a mouthpiece for the cries of the whole creation.

- A king of compassion (vv.41-44). Jesus already knows his end, and one could expect him to feel sorry for himself. Instead he feels sorry for Jerusalem, which has rejected him and will do so again (cf.13.34-35). Jerusalem's destruction is because of its rejection of peace (v.42) and is the inevitable consequence of its misunderstanding of the genuine nature of kingship.
- A king who must give up his life to achieve his goal. In Luke the procession starts at the Mount of Olives, the place where Jesus' arrest later takes place, leading to his death. Jesus' kingship can be properly understood only retrospectively, through the cross.

All ages together

See p.19 for an idea to engage very young children during worship.

Present the reading

Gather around the signpost and invite two or three people to tell the remembered story of the entry into Jerusalem. Give some other people a copy of Luke's Gospel account and invite them to check the spoken version against the reading. When the telling is over, invite those with the written-down version to point out the differences. Talk about what is distinctive about Luke's perspective. Invite participants to remember parts of the story that have particular significance for them. There were many voices in the crowd, and many silent people too, so encourage them to tell it from their point of view.

Explore the reading

When we 'remember the gospel' we can also find ourselves overlooking some of the episodes that get repeated less often, or not being so aware of the fine differences between written versions. Obviously everyone's remembered version will differ slightly because people are like that. But there are also important differences in the recorded versions we need to be aware of, if only because they present us with a different picture of Jesus and a different emphasis on his mission. When we tell the story of palms we usually tell the dominant story of Hosanna. But Luke has a different story, of the one who comes in peace. To get the balance right can be tricky.



Prayers

The text of these prayers is on the [WEB](#).

Call to worship

Based on Luke 19.38, holding up palm crosses

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!

Gathering prayer

Based on Luke 19.37-38,46

We welcome you into our church building, Lord:
come, make it a house of prayer.

**Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord.**

We welcome you into our fellowship, Lord:
come, fill our worship with joy and praise.

**Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord.**

We welcome you into our hearts, Lord:
come, teach us your ways of peace.

**Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord.**

Lord Jesus, come to us today,
so we may be transformed,
showing your glory to our neighbours,
and bringing your kingdom to the world.
Amen.

A prayer of confession

With palm crosses

These crosses remind us of what Jesus went through.
Let us ask his forgiveness as we recall his death for us.

We hold these crosses over our heads.
Jesus, we have sinned in what we have thought.
Cross out our selfish ideas, and fill us instead
with your attitude of wanting the best for others.

We hold these crosses over our mouths.
Jesus, we have sinned in what we have said.
Cross out our hurtful words,
and fill us instead with your concern
to speak blessing into others' lives.

We hold these crosses over our hands.
Jesus, we have sinned in what we have done.
Cross out the evil we do,
and instead make us channels of your peace and love.

We stab these crosses over our hearts.
Jesus, we have confessed what comes to our minds.
By your Word and your Spirit,
pierce our hearts,
and help us to see deeper into our condition,
so we can be further healed.

We hold these crosses over our chests.
Jesus, we thank you for your promise
to forgive all who repent and believe your good news.
Amen.

A prayer of approach

Jesus, true and humble king,
entering your city to cries of 'Peace':
enter our hearts today,
and be born anew in us as our Saviour and King.
Amen.

A prayer over palm crosses

Everyone holds up a palm cross

God our Father, may these palms be for us:
signs of Jesus' kingship, reminders of his cross,
and symbols of his victory over sin and death.
Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Based on Luke 19.41-48

As Jesus wept over Jerusalem and cleansed its Temple,
let us pray for our cities and our churches today.
Help us know what will bring us peace, O Lord.

We pray to you for cities in conflict,
where dictators hold on to power
and oppress their own citizens,
and the voice of the people is not heard. Especially...
Help us know what will bring us peace, O Lord.

We pray to you for cities in economic trouble
where the financial crisis has put many out of work,
new businesses cannot get loans to start,
and people do not feel they are all in it together. Especially...
Help us know what will bring us peace, O Lord.

We pray to you for cities suffering natural disaster,
where earthquakes, tsunamis, flooding or fire
have destroyed the infrastructure
and rebuilding has been slow and inefficient. Especially...
Help us know what will bring us peace, O Lord.

We pray to you for all those suffering poor health,
personal disaster, or the death of a loved one. Especially...
Make us faithful in praying, visiting
and caring for those in difficulties.
Help us know what will bring us peace, O Lord.

We pray to you for churches of all denominations,
as what unites us this week is so much bigger
than what divides us.
May we love one another, so the world may know you are
among us.
**Help us know what will bring us peace, O Lord.
Amen.**

Respond to the Word

Ideas to suit different interests, ages and learning preferences.
The Children's Sheet [WEB](#) offers activities to do in worship & at home.

The stones would shout

Paint stones and place them around the cross signpost. On the stones paint symbols, names for, or words about, Jesus that could be what the stones would shout aloud if his disciples (us) stay silent. Use the symbols and words on the stones in a prayer.

The view from the road

Consider this response to the Palm Sunday story. As a disabled person with very limited mobility, Andrew sees himself sitting by the side of the road as Jesus comes by. He can't see much from ground level except people's legs. He can hear the shouting but what are they shouting about and what for? What do members of the crowd say to Andrew to explain what is going on? What would Jesus say to Andrew?

What did you see?

Play a version of 'I went to market and into my basket I put...'. This version begins, 'I went to Jerusalem and I saw', enabling people to recall one at a time the remembered things about Palm Sunday. Each person recalls the things those before have said and then adds another.

A simple worship activity for all ages

Take the palm crosses (see *Gather*) and write words of peace on them with a felt pen – maybe in different languages. You will need to have some felt pens and some examples of words for peace in different languages, perhaps on a projector slide. Then invite people to swap their cross with someone else (perhaps at the point when the peace is shared), saying, 'The peace of the Lord Jesus be with you' as they exchange crosses.

When very young children are present

Today's activity offers a chance to play with things that help us to think about Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.

You will need: building blocks (wooden blocks, Duplo™, cardboard boxes), a long strip of cloth or paper to represent a road, a hobby-horse or a donkey head on a stick.

You might begin with this short paraphrase: Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (*mime riding action*). The people laid down their coats to make a path for him (*mime laying down coats*). They waved palm branches (*wave hand*) and called out 'Blessed is the king' (*invite children to repeat the phrase*). 'Peace in heaven' (*invite children to repeat the phrase*). Repeat so the children can join in.

Invite the children to build a model of a gateway out of the building blocks, and re-enact Jesus entering Jerusalem.

End by repeating the Bible actions.

Using today's psalm

Psalm 118.1-2,19-29

This psalm is strongly associated with the victory of Easter, so it might seem strange to find it on a day when the account of the crucifixion is read in church. Yet we're not hearing the story in real time – we know that after death comes new life – and so it is a song of faith today, to proclaim 'This is the day...we will rejoice...'. Having said that, we will meet many of the same verses again next Sunday, so decide: two different settings, to reflect where we are in the liturgical year. Or one, known and familiar, that people can sing confidently.

Response line Between verses, everyone says or sings: This the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. There is a response action on the [WEB](#).

Hymns and songs based on Psalm 118 can be found in PAME, MCW1, NE and the Decani collection of Lent and Easter music *Resurrexit*.

Hymns and songs

Songs in italics are suitable for all ages.

A key to abbreviations is on the [WEB](#).

All glory, laud and honour
Broken for me, broken for you
 From heaven you came
 Go to dark Gethsemane
 Here is love vast as the ocean
How deep the Father's love for us
 I will sing the wondrous story
 Jesus, donkey-carried treasure (EOA)
Jesus rode a donkey into town (KS)
 Lift high the cross
 My song is love unknown
 O sacred head
 Praise to the holiest in the height
 Ride on, ride on in majesty (MP)
 Ride on, ride on the time is right (EOA, WGRG)
There is a Redeemer
Trotting...through Jerusalem (CP, HP)
We have a king who rides a donkey
Were you there when they crucified my Lord
 When I survey the wondrous cross

Send out

Live in faith

Invite people to take their palm cross home and set it up somewhere they will see it and remember. Each day they could offer the prayer 'Peace in heaven and glory to God', for someone or situation that they hear about.

Pray

Holding up palm crosses

Let us follow our Jesus, our King and our Saviour:
 let us sing of his goodness and shout him our praise,
 let us hold to him firmly, recall how he suffered,
 let us live his forgiveness and peace all our days. **Amen.**

Passion: the final steps

Planning

Lectionary Bible readings

Palm Sunday: Passion readings
RCL Year C, Isaiah 50.4-9a,
Psalm 31.9-16, Philippians 2.5-11,
Luke 23.1-49

Theme Towards Jerusalem

Luke describes Jesus setting his face to Jerusalem. Over seven weeks we travel with Jesus on his journey from the Mount of Transfiguration to the glory of the cross. Read more about the theme on page 1 and in *Month by month* on the [WEB](#).

Week 7 of 7

Passion: the final steps Luke 23.1-49

Material to explore the Passion of Christ. This may be used on Palm Sunday or during Holy Week. *ROOTS Children & Young People* magazine offers resources for Holy Week for use in holiday clubs.

This week provides an opportunity to:

- reflect on the cross.

Gather

Prepare the space

Make the signpost you have used over the last few weeks into a cross. If you want to put something on the arms, then have 'Jerusalem' on one horizontal arm and 'Here and Now' on the opposite arm.

Gathering words

During our time together we have an opportunity to remember the events of the first Holy Week and think about how they affect us here and now.

Open the Word

Bible notes are on the [WEB](#).

Sermon ideas

- Despite their differences of detail, the focus of the passion narrative in all the gospels is straightforward enough: the cross. It has been said that Luke lacks a theology of the cross, but it may be preferable to think of him as

not labouring a point that his readers, familiar with Paul, would already have grasped.

- The theology of the cross is uniquely Christian and may be observed from a variety of perspectives. At its simplest the cross is a swap. Christ dies in my place that I may go free. In an exchange of punishment for freedom (v.25), Jesus takes the penalty rightly deserved by Barabbas, who is released unconditionally.
- The cross should inspire our self-examination, not our sympathy (vv.27-31 – only in Luke). The coming destruction of Jerusalem may be seen as a picture of a final judgement: the people caught up in it, the descendants of those who made Jerusalem the way it is, and in the same way a last judgement will impact on all who inherit Adam's nature.
- The cross is the price of salvation (vv.35-41). The watchers (rulers, soldiers and one criminal) sneer and misunderstand 'save' to mean something trivial, but the other criminal acknowledges that punishment for misdeeds is just: sin has implications.
- The cross forces us to evaluate Jesus (v.35). The community to which Jesus came expected the Messiah to be the deliverer from Roman occupation, but his being 'numbered with the transgressors' (v.33; cf. Isaiah 53.12) reveals a Messiah who is the Suffering Servant, saving by bearing our punishment. The cross is the true measure of Jesus' kingship (v.38), the sign conveying a truth beyond that discerned by the gospel writers.
- The cross brings unmerited mercy (vv.40-43). Only Luke's account includes the penitent thief and his plea, intended to motivate us to the same response. An open admission of deserving death lays the ground for free forgiveness and welcome into the kingdom. There was no time for the thief to bear the fruits of his repentance and be baptised: salvation is by grace alone.
- The cross destroys the barrier between sinners and God (v.45) as the curtain separating the people from the Holy of Holies is torn apart. Henceforth there is free access to God for those formerly kept apart by their guilt.

- The cross converts (vv.47-48). Luke is cautious about putting Mark's 'This was the Son of God' into the centurion's mouth, perhaps because as a Roman title it would make Jesus merely equivalent to a Caesar. But the impact on the centurion and the bystanders is such as to strike to their hearts. Luke's conclusion of the crucifixion narrative shows he thinks the cross can still have this impact for his readers.

Present the reading

Gather around the signpost that is now a cross and remember the story of the Passion. You may want to read it all together in one stretch or in part, in one voice or with different voices. You may want to have participants recalling their reactions in between or retelling from their perspective. Be confident about this as a community exercise: we work at developing our capacity for doing theology by doing it together. You might like to share food as you talk: this is a long story and eating together will help people to concentrate and engage in the community activity. You could share hot cross buns or simple biblical food such as figs and dates. You may want to sing the Taizé chant 'Jesus remember me' as you work through the story.

Explore the reading

The passion narrative is the heart of each of the four gospels. Arguably the rest of the narrative is a build-up to this point. All the rest has been the introductory remarks – longer in some gospels than others. Invite people to reflect on their journey through Lent, leading up to this point. People may be able to remember the Gospel stories read in the last few weeks; they will have their own personal experiences to note; there may be insights that have emerged from using the *ROOTS* Lent calendar, for example. The journey to the cross is characterised by the gospel writers as a journey to Jerusalem. Offer A5-size pieces of paper or card and felt pens, wax crayons or paint and invite people to record their Lenten experiences, then lay them down as stones forming a path to the cross. On this occasion used paper and card might be appropriate, so that people write or draw over something that is already there – or on the other side of the paper – reflecting a layering of experiences.

Prayers

More prayers are on the [WEB](#).

Call to worship

Dear friends in Christ,
during Lent we have been preparing for the celebration
of our Lord's death and resurrection,
and in our imagination we have come as far
as the gates and Temple of Jerusalem.
On this day of (or As we remember) his crucifixion,
let us walk with him the way of the cross,
and find it no other than the way of life and peace.

Gathering prayer

Heavenly Father,
look upon the family of your people,
and as we gather to hear again of the cross of your Son,
enlighten us with your Holy Spirit:
that we may hear, understand, and respond
to the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

A prayer of confession

Based on Isaiah 53.3-10

In the shadow of the cross, let us confess our sins to God.
Lord, our conduct has brought you disappointment,
but Jesus carried our sorrows on the cross.

Lord, our deeds have infringed your laws,
but he was pierced for our transgressions.

Lord, our thoughts have been shameful and disgraceful,
but he was crushed for our iniquities.

Lord, we have failed to esteem your ways,
but he was despised and looked down on, for us.

Lord, we have gone astray like lost sheep,
but he was led like a lamb to the slaughter.

Lord, we have made excuses for our sins,
but he did not open his mouth in protest.

Lord, we have deserved death,
but he was cut off from the land of the living.

As you have made his life a sin-offering for us,
forgive us and cleanse us by the blood of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Respond to the Word

Prepare the cross

There may be a cross that you usually use in Holy Week either inside or outside the church. Place things on and around it to reflect your experiences and the biblical narrative. You might want to add items such as the 'King of the Jews' notice and maybe a cloak to represent Jesus' clothes. You could look through Luke's account of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus and add to the cross things that are distinctive to Luke's account – Jesus' words to the women of Jerusalem, for example.

A dice to remember

Make a dice to remember the crucifixion. Use the cube template on the [WEB](#) and draw or write on each face one of the things that happens in chapter 23 of Luke's Gospel: Jesus before Pilate, Jesus before Herod, Jesus sentenced to death, Jesus crucified, the death of Jesus, the burial of Jesus – or choose your own sequence of events. Make the template up into a cube, like a dice, to represent the way the soldiers cast lots to divide up Christ's clothing. Spend some time in small groups rolling the dice and seeing which stories come up that you can retell to each other.

The cock crowed

Consider the story of Peter, who denies Jesus. We shall read the ongoing story of Peter through Eastertime, so this would be a good occasion to think about his experience in more detail. How would it have felt to have been recognised when Jesus was in such danger? How would it have felt to stand in the courtyard and hear the cock crow? Use a recording of the sound of a cock crowing (see link on the [WEB](#)). Play the sound once and have a period of quiet. Then play it again at the end of the quiet time. Pray about the challenges to faith that Easter brings.

A simple worship activity for all ages

Set a table for 13 places. At each place setting put an empty paper plate and some pens/crayons. Invite people to sit at the table and decorate their plate to remember the Last Supper. This might include the bread and wine Jesus shared. It might also include some of the words that were said. If you have more than 13 people attending then just put more empty plates down after the first 13 people have decorated theirs, as a sort of 'rolling Last Supper'.

Send out

Live in faith

Take your dice home. Turn the dice over each day to remember part of the crucifixion story. Offer the prayer, 'Jesus remember me, when you come into your kingdom'.

Pray

In a week when passions run high –
confusion, anger, fear, doubt:
help us, travelling Christ,
to go with you on the road.
Give to us the Spirit of adventure so that,
where there is confusion, patterns may emerge;
where there is anger, love may spring up new;
where there is fear, calm may prevail;
where there is doubt, we may find faith again.
Amen.