

The Passion of Christ

Mark 14.1-15.47

Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey. A woman anoints Jesus' feet during a meal. The following evening, Jesus eats his last supper, is betrayed and arrested. By the next afternoon, after a mock trial, he has been put to death on a cross.

 Look out for ways to connect faith with everyday life.

 Download a Planning Sheet to help prepare your session.

Palm Sunday

Lectionary Bible readings

RCL Palm Sunday Year B

Psalm 118.1-2,19-29

Mark 11.1-11

Passion readings:

Isaiah 50.4-9a

Psalm 31.9-16


Philippians 2.5-11

Mark 14.1-15.47

The Passion story

We present the story of Christ's Passion, retold in six scenes, starting with Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and ending with his death on the cross. Our aim is to help children and young people engage with the surprising and disturbing sequence of events between Palm Sunday and Good Friday, before they experience the joy of Easter Sunday. The material could be used, in part or in full, as a Palm Sunday session for a mixed age group, at an all-age service on Good Friday, or perhaps during a walk of witness or meditations at the cross, or at a separate family event during Holy Week.

Storytelling

The following six scenes are designed to be read aloud by one or two narrators, but you could also use different voices and encourage audience participation. If possible, set each scene in a different location, so the audience travels round the space, and maybe even outside, in the form of a promenade play. Download a PDF of the six scenes .

Linking scenes

To link each scene you could use the following prayer response:

Leader: This is the story of the Saviour of the world.

All: **Let us continue on the way to the cross.**

Alternatively, use the chorus of a song such as 'Lord of the Dance', 'The Servant King', 'Make way, make way', or sing the tune of 'Siyahamba', but change the words to: 'We are walking on the way to the cross'. (See *Sing* on p.21 for more suggestions and tracks to play.)

Activities

There are options for creative and contemplative activities for children and young people after each scene. Depending on your group and the time available, do all of them, or just select a few, and adapt for the ages present if necessary.

1 Jesus arrives in Jerusalem

Mark 11.1-11

Voices: narrator, Jesus. Invite the audience to be the crowd and shout out praises.

The disciples arrived at the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on their journey towards Jerusalem and they came to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus sent two of his disciples on ahead, and told them: 'Go to the next village and just as you get there you will find a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you what you're doing, just tell them that the Lord needs it and will send it back at once.'

The disciples did what Jesus asked of them. They went and found the colt tied to the door of a house. As they

untied it some people asked them what they were doing, and they replied just as Jesus had told them. They brought the colt to Jesus, threw their cloaks over it and helped Jesus get on.

The crowd gathered by the roadside, spreading their cloaks and the branches they had cut in the fields on the ground, and they began to shout out:

'Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!'


The cries of the people continued as Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. 'Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!'



Children's activity

- Make palm streamers using 5cm wide green florist ribbon, cut into equal lengths. Write slogans on the palms with marker pens, e.g. Hosanna! Save us! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
- Encourage the children to wave their streamers and shout their slogans.

Young people's activity

- Make palm crosses using strips of paper (instructions on .
- Play some background music, e.g. 'Sing' by Gary Barlow (see *Sing*) and create a space where people can say or even shout aloud their prayers of praise, as the crowds praised Jesus when he entered Jerusalem.

2 Jesus is anointed

Mark 14.1-11

Voices: narrator, chief priests and teachers of the Law, Jesus. Invite the audience to be the angry voices.

In the quietness of the shadows, the chief priests and teachers of the Law gathered. They were looking for a way to arrest Jesus secretly and put him to death. 'But we mustn't do it during the festival,' they agreed together, 'or the people might riot.' It was now two days before the Feast of Passover.

In a noisy room where friends were chatting, Jesus was eating at the house of a man called Simon, when a woman came in with a precious jar filled with expensive perfume.



In the silence of shocked witnesses, she broke open the jar and poured the ointment over Jesus' head.

In a murmur of unrest, angry voices were raised, asking, 'Why waste such perfume? It could have

been sold for three hundred denarii or more, and the money given to the poor!' But one voice was raised above the others. 'Why are you scolding her?' Jesus asked. 'She has done a good thing for me. You will always have the poor with you and you can be kind to them whenever you wish, but you won't always have me. She has done what she could and anointed my body for the grave. Truly I tell you, what she has done today will often be told and remembered.'

Into the stillness of outside, one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, went to find the chief priests and agreed to betray Jesus. They were very pleased to hear it and promised him money in return, so he began to look for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

Children's activity

- Provide unfragranced baby oil, plastic tubes (available from the party section of pound shops) or containers, one per child, and some lavender essential oil. Help the children to fill their containers with oil, add a drop of the essential oil (undiluted essential oils are very strong, so do this yourself) and mix well; check

with parents beforehand as some children are allergic to/irritated by essential oils.

- Sit quietly in a circle, and invite the children to turn to the person on their left and anoint them with the oil, making the sign of the cross on their palm, and using the words: 'May God bless you and keep you.' You may want to demonstrate first.

Young people's activity

- Create a large piece of artwork, e.g. a banner or canvas, with the name of Jesus at the centre. Decorate with paints or collage materials. Encourage the young people to complete this to a very high standard, viewing the process as an act of worship, just as the woman in the story gave her best to Jesus.
- Invite the young people to take turns in standing before the picture. Affirm that each person is bringing something of themselves to Jesus by saying the words: 'Lord Jesus, (insert name) has just done something wonderfully significant for you' (cf. Mark 14.6, *The Message*).

3 A last supper

Mark 14.12-25

Voices: narrator, Jesus, disciples.

The disciples looked around the table, doubting each other, questioning themselves.

They each remembered how they had prepared for this evening just as Jesus had said – two of them had found a man carrying a water jar just as Jesus had told them, and he had shown them to this large room upstairs, and they had prepared the Passover meal for this, the first day of the Unleavened Bread, exactly as Jesus had asked them to. They had all gathered in the evening to eat together.

But then what they hadn't prepared for... Jesus' words to them all: 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me now.'

All of the disciples were upset, asking, 'Not me, surely?' But Jesus kept saying,

'One of you. One of the twelve. One who is eating with me now.' They just couldn't believe what they were hearing.



And then as they continued to eat, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. He broke it, and gave some to each of them, saying, 'Take, eat.' Then he did the same with a cup of wine. The disciples looked at each other again, confused and saddened. What did he mean? He told them, 'This is my blood, as promised, shed for many. I won't drink wine again until I drink it in God's kingdom.'

Children's activity

- Give each child a plastic cup to decorate with silver/gold paper and stick-on gems.
- Holding their cups, invite the children to sit quietly and think about a special meal that they have had with their family or friends.

- Pray together:

Thank you, Lord,
that on your last evening,
you ate and drank with your friends.
Thank you for our family and friends.
Help us to appreciate them and be
loyal to them.

Amen.

Young people's activity

- Sit together around a table and share bread and red grape juice, remembering the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples, and the symbolism of the bread and the wine. Jesus sat with all his followers, even though he knew that some of them would betray, reject and deny him. Talk about what it means to be accepted, rejected and betrayed.
- Plan a group event, such as a social meal, that the young people could invite their friends to. Arrange a date, design invitations and make it happen.

4 A garden, betrayal and arrest

Mark 14.26-52

Voices: narrator, Jesus, Judas. Invite the audience to change their facial expressions according to what type of night it was.

It was a strange night. First, the meal with friends, Jesus' words about betrayal still ringing in the disciples' ears, then out into the night air, not home, but to the Mount of Olives. Jesus began again, this time telling them that they will all fall away, and Peter, in particular, will deny Jesus three times this very night!

It was a long night. When they got to Gethsemane, Jesus asked some to sit, and others – Peter, James and John – to watch while he prayed. But they just couldn't stay awake, however hard they tried.

It was a sad night. Jesus was full of sorrow as he cried out to God in the garden: 'Abba, Father, take this cup from me, because you can do anything. But your will be done, not mine.'

It was a frightening night. Jesus said: 'The hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up and see, my betrayer is here'. Judas appeared with the chief priests, scribes and elders, and a crowd carrying clubs and swords. Judas approached Jesus. 'Rabbi,' he said and kissed him. This was the sign for the crowd to seize Jesus and arrest him. Fighting broke out and one servant had his ear cut off.

It was a confusing night. Why had Jesus been arrested at night like a robber? Who was the young man who followed and then ran away? What should the disciples do now? And what will the morning bring?



Children's activity

- Make cardboard swords (pre-cut for younger children) and cover them with silver foil.
- A sword is a reminder of all those affected by war. Invite the children to lift up their swords, and say the following prayer:

Lord, help us to fight for justice, not with weapons, but with peaceful actions.
Lay down the swords.
Amen.

Young people's activity

- Gather together in a space illuminated by lots of candles.
- Gradually extinguish the candles, one by one, encouraging the young people to remain silent and reflect on Jesus' Gethsemane experience.

5 A trial and denial

Mark 14.53–15.15

Voices: servant girl, Peter, high priest, Jesus; or use two voices for 'inside' and 'outside'. Invite the audience to make the sound of the cockerel.

Inside, Jesus was being questioned by the high priest, in front of the chief priests, elders and scribes.

Outside, Peter had followed them at a distance and was now sitting in the courtyard with the guards, keeping warm by the fire.

Inside, members of the council were trying to find evidence to put Jesus to death, but they couldn't find any. The witnesses tried to lie but their stories didn't add up.

Outside, a servant girl was looking at Peter more closely. 'You were with Jesus of Nazareth, weren't you?' she said. 'I don't know what you mean,' denied Peter, moving away. The cock crowed.



Inside, the high priest began to question Jesus himself about what the witnesses were saying, but Jesus remained silent.

Outside, the serving girl began to talk to other people about Peter, but again he spoke out, and denied it.

Inside, the high priest asked again, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' 'Yes, I am!' Jesus said.

Outside, bystanders began to question Peter about whether he was one of Jesus' followers, but he swore, saying 'No, I am not! I do not know the man you're talking about!' And the cock crowed again.

Inside, the high priest shouted with anger and the people condemned Jesus to death. Outside, Peter remembered that Jesus had told him that he would deny him three times before the cock crowed twice.

Inside, Jesus was spat at by the people and hit by the guards.

Outside, Peter, Jesus's friend who had denied knowing him, just as Jesus said he would, broke down and wept.

Children's activity

- Give everyone an A4 piece of white card entitled 'Following Jesus' and provide lots of different-sized blue paper fish. Encourage the children to stick lots of fish on their card, all swimming in the same direction.
- Sitting together with their blue fish pictures in front of them, remind the children that, as Peter found, it is not always easy to follow Jesus – sometimes it means swimming against the tide. Invite everyone to take a gold paper fish and stick it on their picture, swimming in the opposite direction.

Young people's activity

- Place a chair in the middle of the room and ask for a volunteer to play the part of Peter and sit in the 'hot seat'. Invite the rest of the group to interview 'Peter' and ask him about his actions. Alternatively, ask a leader to play the part of Peter.
- Spend some time researching the persecuted church [WEB](#). Pray for those who find themselves under pressure or persecuted, and thank God for the courage that they show in the face of difficulty.

6 Crucifixion and burial

Mark 15.16-47

*Voices: narrator, Pilate, Jesus, centurion.
Invite the audience to shout, 'Crucify him!'*

As soon as it was morning, the whole council met and delivered Jesus to Pilate. Pilate questioned Jesus: 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered, 'You have said so.' But Jesus would not answer any of the other accusations made against him, and Pilate was amazed.

Pilate gave the crowd a choice. He asked them if they would like to save Jesus, or Barabbas, who was a murderer. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd against Jesus and they chose Barabbas.

Pilate asked again, 'Then what shall I do with the man you call King of the Jews?' And the crowd replied, 'Crucify him!'

The guards mocked Jesus, dressed him in a purple cloak and crown of thorns, saluted him, hit him and spat at him.

They led Jesus to Golgotha, and Simon of Cyrene helped to carry the cross. When they got there, they crucified him, alongside two robbers. The charge read, 'King of the Jews'. And many continued to mock him.

After three hours of darkness, Jesus cried out to God in despair. The people watched to see what would happen. Jesus cried out again with his last breath and died. At that moment, the curtain in the Temple was torn in two, and a centurion saw it all and declared, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.'

When evening came, Pilate let Joseph of Arimathea have Jesus' body. Joseph wrapped Jesus in a linen cloth and laid him in a tomb cut from the rock. A stone was rolled against the entrance to the tomb.

This must be the end...surely?



Children's activity

- This links Good Friday with Easter Day. Give everyone a box template [WEB](#), photocopied onto card. Ask them to cut it out and colour one side of the 'cross' in dark colours to represent Good Friday: red, black, grey, purple. Invite them to colour the other side of the cross yellow and orange, like the sun rising on Easter morning. On this bright background, write the words: 'Jesus has risen. He's alive!' Help the children to stick their boxes together with sticky tape, the dark side facing the outside.
- Come together, holding the boxes. Say: These boxes are a symbol of Good Friday, when Jesus died on the cross: the day the sky turned black, the day a grey stone was rolled in front of his tomb, the purple of grief. It was a very sad day. But that isn't the end of the story, because three days later, as the sun began to rise, Mary visited the tomb. (Invite the children to open up their boxes and lay them out as crosses, bright side up.) And what did she find? Jesus had risen. Shout out together: **He's alive!**

Young people's activity

- Place a large wooden cross in the centre of the space. Provide slips of paper, pens, nails and a hammer. Invite the young people, if they wish, to write their name on the paper and nail it to the cross, as a symbol of their personal acceptance of what Jesus has done for them.
- Drape some red cloth around the base of the cross and create a quiet space, where young people can sit at the foot of the cross in silent reflection and prayer, thinking about the crucifixion and all that it means for them.

For very young children

Play and explore Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Play materials: branches and palm crosses.

Storytelling

Give each child a role and a corresponding prop: Jesus (hobby horse), crowd (small leafy branches or pieces of cloth), and invite them to act out the story as you tell it.

Jesus rode on a donkey along the road to Jerusalem.

Some people spread their cloaks on the road.

Others put branches on the road.

Jesus was in the centre of the procession, and all the people around him were shouting:

'Hosanna!'

'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!'

'Praise God in highest heaven!'

Jesus came in to Jerusalem and went to the Temple to pray.

Play

Invite the children to construct 'Jerusalem' out of building bricks. Then lay out a strip of cloth as a road and invite them to place paper or felt leaves and cloaks on it, and move Jesus and donkey figures along it.

Create

Give each child a sheet of paper with the word 'Hosanna' written on in bubble writing, and invite them to colour in or decorate the letters with collage bits. Then help them to attach their paper to a plant stick with sticky tape, to make a flag to wave.

Dance

Invite the children to dance to some Hosanna praise music [WEB](#). They could wave their flags, or streamers or branches.

Pray

Lay out a cloth 'road' and give each child a leaf or a palm cross to place on it. Finish with a praise shout:

Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Praise God in highest heaven!

[WEB](#) More prayers for Palm Sunday and Holy Week.

Sing

[WEB](#) Abbreviations and music links* in *Hymns, songs & music*.

Ho-Ho-Ho Hosanna, CedarMont Kids*
Make way, make way

Give me joy in my heart

I danced in the morning

From heaven you came

Jesus took a piece of bread (CHY, HON, RSJ)

One Way, Hillsong Kids (with actions)*

I see the King of glory (Hosanna), Hillsong
United*

Sing, Gary Barlow*

Testify To Love, Avalon on *Testify To Love**

Lead Me To The Cross, Chris And Conrad on *Chris*

*And Conrad**

Should've Been Me, Citizen Way on *My Saviour Lives**