

The Passion of Christ

Mark 14.1–15.47

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.

This week's resources explore: the way to the cross.

 Look out for ways to connect faith with everyday life.

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

Lectionary note

The lectionary offers two sets of readings for this Sunday. The first set focuses on Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday); the second on the Passion of Christ. In some traditions, both sets are used today. The resources below explore the whole Passiontide story, beginning on Palm Sunday. Resources specifically for the Palm Sunday readings are available online [WEB](#).

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

The Passion in six scenes

These scenes could be used together as the basis for a single service on Palm Sunday or Good Friday, or individually across the six days of Holy Week (Palm Sunday to Good Friday) as part of a daily act of worship. For each scene there is a gathering prayer or response, some ideas for intercessions, a sermon idea and suggestions for an all-age conversation, and a simple worship activity. The story itself is told by splitting the Passion Gospel into six parts as indicated. These could be presented dramatically, with a narrator and different people voicing the various roles. Alternatively, a shorter and all-age friendly retelling of the six scenes is available on the [WEB](#).

① Jesus arrives in Jerusalem Mark 11.1-11

An all-age retelling is available on the [WEB](#).

A prayer for all ages together

Hosanna! **Hosanna!**
Glory to God in the highest!
Hosanna! Hosanna!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!
And peace to all people on earth.
Hosanna! Hosanna!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!

Intercessions

Pray for all who greet Jesus, shouting their hosannas.

Pray for those who reject Jesus.

Pray for those who are swept along by the majority, rather than speaking up for what is right.

Pray for those who stand by, feeling powerless and unable to help.

Sermon idea

How did the disciples think they would be serving Jesus? Probably not by getting him a donkey! Sometimes discipleship consists of simply carrying out the ordinary tasks with love. So, we might discover that serving God involves not grand gestures or dramatic changes, but serving coffee, moving tables, fetching all sorts of 'donkeys'. These can be the hardest tasks of all.

All-age conversation

A way for leaders to help all ages explore the reading.

The crowds have come to Jerusalem with Jesus. They have heard his

teaching. They go on ahead to organise a welcoming party. But they also seem to have misplaced expectations: that Jesus is someone who will solve all their problems here and now. And for the most part, they probably have no idea of what is really about to happen. But Jesus remains calm, passive, silent and completely unpretentious – riding on a donkey, neither criticising nor confirming the crowd's acclamation. Invite people to form small groups and to discuss whether our expectations of the political or religious leaders – i.e. those of our day – are realistic or not. Has our understanding of what God really wants to do in our lives been amiss? Have our expectations been too low? What *should* we expect of Jesus?

A simple worship activity

Give everyone a palm cross. Ask everyone to raise their cross high and join in with the words at: **It's not about me. All the praise is yours! Hosanna!**

Invite people to think about a time when they were praised for something that was good about them. Offer this prayer: Jesus, it's great to be encouraged. Thank you that I received kind words. Thank you for giving me the gift that was praised. Thank you! because (*raise crosses*): **It's not about me...**

Invite people to think about a time when they were praised when they didn't deserve it. Pray: Jesus, I love praise, but when I receive kind words that don't belong to me, help me to be humble because (*raise crosses*): **It's not about me...**

Invite people to think about a time when they were criticised and didn't deserve it. Pray: Jesus, the crowd turned against you and rejected you. Help me, too, to forgive unkindness because (*raise crosses*): **It's not about me...**

2 Jesus is anointed

Mark 14.1-11

An all-age retelling is available on the [WEB](#).

A prayer for all ages together

O Mary, what have you done?

You have prepared your Saviour for death by washing his feet with your tears and anointing him with expensive perfume.

O disciples, what have you done?

You have spoilt the moment by criticising a grateful sinner with her extravagant gift of love.

O Jesus, what have you done?

Your time is running out, your ministry is almost at an end, yet you let your feelings show.

There is a meal to get ready,

O Jesus, our Lord.

There are last words to be spoken,

O Jesus, our Master.

There are final goodbyes to say,

O Jesus, our Saviour.

Intercessions

Pray for those who have the courage to admit they were wrong.

Pray for those seeking to turn their lives around.

Pray for those who are quick to condemn and judge others.

Pray for the poor and needy and vulnerable, who are always with us.

Sermon idea

Two days before the Passover, at an ordinary meal, a woman approaches and does an extraordinary thing. Perhaps intuition tells her that Jesus will not be with them long, and she wants to show her great love for him. Perhaps intuition tells Judas the same thing, but his reaction is very different. The ship he has jumped aboard is not bound for a land laden with treasure and triumph, it appears instead to be sinking and must be abandoned. Will we go with Judas or stay with Mary?

All-age conversation

A way for leaders to help all ages explore the reading.

Jesus is surrounded by people, but only one person seems to understand the sacrifice he is about to make. She responds with a costly sacrifice of her own. Some men are preparing to kill Jesus. Judas is preparing to betray him. The guests at Simon's house seem

interested only in the apparent waste of the perfume. If this was happening in today's world, in our culture, what might be the equivalent of the alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard? What could we bring or do to show Jesus that we understand and appreciate what he is about to do? In what way(s) can we show Jesus, this Holy Week, that we are beginning to understand his Passion?

A simple worship activity

Use these questions as a way into meditation and prayer. Keep a time of silence after each one for people to consider their response; encourage them to be imaginative in their reflections.

- Who or what do I love extravagantly?
- How do I show my love?
- What act of love, service, generosity have I taken for the object of my love?
- What risk(s) have I taken for the object of my love?
- Remembering that this is just an echo of Jesus' love for me, can I imagine myself in the place of the woman in the story, anointing Jesus?

Conclude with a meditative love song, e.g. 'Father, we love you', or 'Ubi caritas et amor'.

3 A last supper

Mark 14.12-25

An all-age retelling is available on the [WEB](#).

A prayer for all ages together

A meal like any other, a time to relax with friends and discuss the events of the day.

Bless the bread and give thanks to God.

A meal like no other, a time to say goodbye and explain what is to happen.

Break the bread and share it around.

A final meal, a last supper, a time to let go and to let the words sink in.

Your body broken for us.

Take the cup, pour the wine; bless it and pass it around.

Your blood shed for us.

Intercessions

Pray for those whose tables are groaning with food and drink.

Pray for those who go to bed hungry and wake to empty cupboards.

Pray for those who know how to share what they have.

Pray for those who have no one with which to share good times and bad.

Sermon idea

Jesus knows that the one who will betray him is seated with him sharing his table. But this does not stop him washing Judas' feet. It does not stop him offering Judas the bread that is his body or the wine that is his blood. Again and again Judas is offered another chance, an opportunity to change his mind. So too is forgiveness held out to us constantly; it is always available for us. It is up to us to decide whether we will accept it or not.

All-age conversation

A way for leaders to help all ages explore the reading.

From this point in the story, we begin to see how Jesus is rejected by those closest to him. This can be a particularly bitter experience. Ask people to suggest experiences that Jesus would have shared with Judas – encourage people to think of Bible stories other than those where Judas is named. For example, was he at the Sermon on the Mount, did he help pick up the leftovers at the feeding of the five thousand? And so on. For a long time, Judas was a friend! Ask people to suggest examples in public life where someone has been betrayed. Without asking them to share experiences, invite people to recall times in their own lives when they have been betrayed by someone they trusted. How bitter is that? Keep a time of silence.

A simple worship activity

Give everyone a heart-shaped card, small enough to fit in the palm of the hand. Suggest that forgiving someone who has betrayed or hurt us can be a long and painful journey, and needs us to commit to engaging with that process. Invite people to think of someone among their friends or family who has hurt them or done them wrong. Ask them to look at the heart they have been given, and to imagine that God has given them a forgiving heart. Invite them to imagine how Jesus feels towards Judas as he hands him a piece of bread at the last supper, and at the same time to confess that their empathy towards the person who has wronged them is much weaker than that Jesus had for Judas – and ask God to make their forgiving heart a little stronger each day.

4 A garden, betrayal and arrest

Mark 14.26-52

An all-age retelling is available on the [WEB](#).

A meditation for all ages

Use this Taizé chant after each line – you could say or sing it.

Stay with me. Remain here with me. Watch and pray.

Jesus says: 'Sit here and keep awake while I pray.'

Abba Father, all things are possible for you.

Let this cup pass. Yet not what I want, but what you want.

Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.

Why are you still asleep?

See, the hour has come and the betrayer is at hand.

Intercessions

Pray for those preparing themselves for death.

Pray for those having to say goodbye to loved ones.

Pray for those giving support to others in their final moments.

Pray for those hoping for a last-minute reprieve.

Sermon idea

The Son of Man is betrayed, but although it is within his power to annihilate those who betrayed him and those who will arrest him, he does not do so. With a determined act he breaks the cycle of vengeance: the Scriptures must be fulfilled. In the darkness of the garden, Jesus turns towards the light of God and finds there the strength to fulfil his purpose. We, too, must not allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by darkness, but instead turn always towards the light, trusting in God's loving purpose for us.

All-age conversation

A way for leaders to help all ages explore the reading.

Do you think Peter, James and John meant to fall asleep while Jesus was going through such a difficult time? Do you think they planned to run away? Would things have been different if they had stayed awake, and if they had not run away? Ask for suggestions of wrongs that have happened in our world – or are happening now – but we don't see because we are too weary or overloaded, or to which we 'turn a blind eye' because we can't bear to think about the issues involved. During the Second World War, there was a Christian pastor called Martin Niemöller who opposed the Nazis – and especially the way in which they tried to control the churches. He spoke out and was imprisoned for doing so. But he is probably best remembered for writing these words [WEB](#): 'First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Trade Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.' What do you make of these words?

A simple worship activity

Place a map of the world where everyone can see it – e.g. on the floor or on a table. Nearby place a supply of tealights and a lighter. Invite people to come and put a tealight on a place in the world that needs – or its people need – our attention and prayer, and to name the place aloud. If they want to draw attention to a group of people or a situation that is not associated with a geographical place, the tealight can be placed along the edges of the map. Finish by offering a prayer asking for the grace to be caring, watchful and courageous.

5 A trial and denial

Mark 14.53–15.15

An all-age retelling is available on the [WEB](#).

A meditation for all ages

Keep a time of silence after each line.

You stand before the high priest; have you no answer to the charges against you?

And are you the Messiah, the Son of God?

Then you deserve to die, but we have no power to put you to death; send him to Pilate.

So are you the King of the Jews? This is a matter for Herod.

Why do you remain silent? Take him back to Pilate.

I find no reason to put this man to death; have him flogged.

Who would you like me to release – Jesus or Barabbas?

Then I wash my hands; take him away to be crucified!

Intercessions

Pray for those with power over life and death.

Pray for those playing their part in brutal systems.

Pray for the victims of torture and oppression.

Pray for those who wash their hands of others' fates.

Sermon idea

Here Peter plumbs the depths of his cowardice. He can no longer hide the flaws of his character from himself, but must recognise and face his failings. But it is upon this broken man that Jesus has chosen to build his Church; through his weakness God's strength is able to shine; through his utter dependence on God, God's will can be done. We are never too damaged or too unworthy to serve God.

All-age conversation

A way for leaders to help all ages explore the reading.

Jesus predicted that Peter was going to deny him, but how do you think he felt having to watch it happen?

Invite people, in small groups, to share an experience of a time when a friend or colleague should have 'stuck up' for them when they were in trouble, and didn't. How did they feel? What are we to make of the fact that, according to John's Gospel, Jesus did not forget what happened but asked Peter about it – by the shore, after breakfast? He asked Peter three times whether he loved him, mirroring Peter's three denials. Offer the bitterness of your experience of being let down to God.



A simple worship activity

Invite everyone to use their bodies to acknowledge regret for the ways in which they have denied Jesus in their lives. This could be by belittling their faith, or by failing to stand up for others, or perhaps in some other ways. Keep a time of silence for people to think about this. Then play music that evokes the feeling of being stricken – e.g. 'He was despised' from Handel's *Messiah*, or the Iona Community's 'Lay down your head' – and suggest that people put their head in their hands, like Peter as he left to weep; or they might choose to kneel or even prostrate themselves, laying face down on the floor; or they could come to stand or kneel at the foot of the cross (assuming you have one on display); or just simply stand very still. End with a prayer of confession; it could be *A prayer of confession* from last week's resources (p.15), or a traditional text or extempore.

6 Crucifixion and burial

Mark 15.16-47

An all-age retelling is available on the [WEB](#).

A prayer for all ages together

based on Psalm 22

My God, my God:

Why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me?

O my God, I cry to you night and day, but you do not answer.

I am poured out like water:

Evildoers are all around me.

They divide my clothes among themselves.

O Lord, come quickly to my aid!

Intercessions

Pray for those who cry out in the silence of the night.

Pray for those who cry out in the day and are drowned out by noise.

Pray for those who feel forsaken and abandoned.

Pray for those who are quickly forgotten.

Sermon idea

It would be easier, less painful, to go straight from the triumph of Palm Sunday to the joy of Easter, to celebrate Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem followed by his resurrection from the tomb. But this would make the message as empty as the tomb itself. It is important to enter the silence and emptiness of Good Friday and Holy Saturday. It is only by facing the struggle and enduring the pain that we can offer hope to those who journey through darkness, or stand with others in their forsakenness.

All-age conversation

A way for leaders to help all ages explore the reading.

Jesus is finally helpless as he hangs on the cross, but is still mocked by the bystanders, by religious leaders, and by the person who offered him a sponge of vinegar on a stick. How do we feel

about being teased? Teasing is so often unkindness disguised as good fun. Either share an example of your own, or ask the congregation to share an experience, perhaps from a long time ago. This is the final humiliation of Jesus.

But Mark tells of some tender-hearted moments too. The bystanders included a group of women who knew Jesus – what did they do for Jesus? And Joseph of Arimathea – what was his important role? And finally, there was the centurion – do you recall what he said at the moment Jesus died? Does anyone know the opening words of Mark's Gospel? They are like bookends to the story – something Mark was fond of doing, but this time it is to the whole story, the whole Gospel from Jesus' baptism to his death: it is the story of the Son of God.

A simple worship activity

Prepare a display of newspaper cuttings or images from the internet of people who are mocked undeservedly in various ways. For example: slum dwellers, refugees, homeless people, people who are considered to look 'different' – and any others you can think of. Describe each image to give context. Then invite people to pray, saying: 'Jesus, you were mocked and humiliated', and ask everyone to respond: 'This is your face. We will not mock. We will bear witness.' End with a prayer of thanksgiving for those who saw Jesus for who he was then, and for those who recognise him in people who suffer innocently now.

See www.rootsontheweb.com

Bible notes

With very young children: resources on the reading to use with under 5s.

Children's Sheet and **Colouring Sheet** (Welsh versions available).

Bible study: a selection of this week's resources to print out.

Hymns and songs

Suggestions are available online [WEB](#).