

Palm/Passion

This week's readings are ones of celebration and protest. In Mark 11:1–11, people who process with Jesus into Jerusalem do so as a form of a counter-protest. In John 12:12–16, the actions of those who come to meet Jesus as he enters the city challenge political power. Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29 is one way to remember the people's protest against slavery in Egypt, and to celebrate God's saving actions.



Focus scripture: Mark 11:1–11

At the start of Passover, Jesus rides into the city of Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey. Large crowds gather around and follow him. People spread cloaks on the road; others spread leafy branches cut from the fields. While this was a seemingly simple procession, it was likely a more complex challenge to political power.

The book *The Last Week*, written by New Testament scholars Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, offers an account of what the gospels say about Jesus' last days in Jerusalem. The authors note that at the same time Jesus was entering the city of Jerusalem by one gate, Pilate was entering from another gate in another part of the city. Pilate's procession was a striking display of state and military power. He entered with warhorses and Roman soldiers. It is Passover, a festival when the people remember their time of enslavement in Egypt and celebrate their freedom from tyranny. Part of their history of remembrance includes their ancestors challenging and fleeing from Egypt's Pharaoh. For Pilate, his stately display in Passover may have also served to remind people of the day to maintain order, and that they should not resist their current ruling authority. Even as they remember protesting in the past, they should not do that in the present. In some ways, Pilate's processional was a manifestation of empire.

Jesus' processional, by contrast, was a simple one where he rode a donkey. "According to the prophet Zechariah, the king entering Jerusalem on a donkey was to banish weapons of war from the land and speak peace to the nations" (Marcus J Borg, "Holy Week: Two Different Meanings"). The people

shouted "Hosanna," which means "save us." The crowds with Jesus were not people who traditionally held power in society. They were part of a peripheral religious group that was led by an unusual leader. One way of describing this processional is as a counter-protest that resisted the status quo.

In **John 12:12–16**, the alternative gospel reading for this week, there is also a challenge to the status quo and a hope for change. People who follow are part of an outlier religious group. When Jesus came into Jerusalem, he was not only entering a centre of power, but also a place of potential danger. Some note that his deliberate entry may have been a defiant act against Roman rule. In this story of the entry into Jerusalem, the people come with palm branches. Palm branches were national symbol at the time and used in "official" processions of powerful and influential people. Some suggest that people on the margins using palm branches may have been a way of challenging such authority.

Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29 is a processional psalm sung by pilgrims coming to worship on high holy days. It is a thanksgiving for God's liberating and saving work, God's steadfast and enduring love. This Psalm was one of the Egyptian Hallel's – an Egyptian hymn of praise. Egyptian Hallel's are still used during Passover today.



Palm Sunday is a day to both celebrate with Jesus and to remember the counter-protests and challenges to authority. What does it mean to celebrate Jesus? How do we tell the stories of the protests in Jesus' day and the present day?

Focus scripture

Mark 11:1–11

Additional scriptures

Liturgy of Palms

John 12:12–16

Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29

Liturgy of the Passion

Isaiah 50:4–9a

Psalm 31:9–16

Philippians 2:5–11

Mark 14:1–15:47 or

Mark 15:1–39, (40–47)

When we celebrate, and when we protest, we are thankful that you are present with us, O God. Help us to discern when to challenge authority, and when to use power for good. May we continue to follow in the way of Jesus. Amen.

Lectio Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for All Ages



This session is designed for all ages to come together for approximately one hour to explore together the many events which happened during Jesus' last week, from the hosannas of his entry into Jerusalem to the accounts of his arrest, trial, death, and burial. If you will be using this plan with a single age group you may need to adapt the materials for your particular group and follow a familiar format.

The resources for this session are designed to help participants experience the stories of Holy Week. The youngest children will benefit from having some idea of the difficulties Jesus and the disciples faced during the days leading up to Jesus' death in order to understand the wonder of the Easter story. Consider how you might help the youngest members of the group to hear the story at their level, while also providing space for older children, youth, and adults to deepen their faith

through this journey with Jesus. Pray that the participants will hear the stories of these Holy Week events with the assurance of God's love.

Leadership: Consider having a group of leaders (preferably a team other than those who offer weekly leadership) to plan and lead the sessions for this week and next. Invite youth or adult participants to be the storytellers for the engagement with the focus passage. Choose a variety of Respond activity zones to meet the needs of the age range of the group.

Prepare

Before the session

- Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures, Psalm 31:9–16, Isaiah 50:4–9a, Mark 11:1–11, Mark 14:1–15:47, Philippians 2:5–11, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 43).
- Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and CD player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.
- Prepare a worship space with purple or red fabric, Bible with a bookmark placed in the gospel of Mark, candle, matches, and offering basket.

Gather

- Bring, if possible, the song "To You, O God" (p. 40 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- Bring self-adhesive name tags.

Engage

- Bring copies of this week's resource sheet "[Holy Week Stories](#)" (enough for all storytellers and participants); recruit a storyteller for each station.
- Prepare seven stations with small tables or boxes covered with different colours of fabric, placing one of the following items

in each one: green fabric/tree branch, yellow fabric/perfume bottle, purple fabric/loaf of bread and bottle of grape juice, grey fabric/rock, red fabric/picture of a rooster, black fabric/small cross, and in the last station a length of white cloth.

Respond

Choose from the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- Art zone:** art supplies, such as finger-paints, watercolours, pastels, collage items
- Meditation zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Holy Week Reflections](#)," construction paper
- Clay zone:** modelling clay
- Game zone:** enlarge the symbol illustrations on the bottom of this week's resource sheet "[Holy Week Reflections](#)," and make several copies; cut symbol "cards" apart, making sets of cards with two of each symbol in each set
- Bible zone:** copies of [biblical background](#) material (p. 43)

Bless

- Bring, if possible, the song "Comfort Me" (pp. 12–13 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #14 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



Palm/Passion

Scripture

Mark 1:1–11 and
Mark 14:1—15:47

FOCUS To explore together the stories of Holy Week

Gather

Welcome participants as they arrive, introducing guests and newcomers. Distribute name tags and invite group members to print their first names and decorate their tags. Help younger children as needed.

Opening ritual

Call to gather Invite participants to gather in the worship space. Explain that this is the last Sunday in the season of Lent.

If the colour red has been used, explain that this colour means that this is a special Sunday. We call it Palm/Passion Sunday. Ask a volunteer to light the candle and receive an offering.

Sing or listen to “To You, O God” (p. 40 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #17 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Pray O God, open our minds and hearts as we hear stories about Jesus’ last week with his disciples. Amen.

Extinguish the candle to signify the end of the gathering worship.

Connecting with the focus

Invite participants to name as many different emotions as they can. Younger children might want to show these emotions with facial gestures. Older children and youth could mime different emotions while the rest of the group guesses what is being portrayed. Explain that there are many different emotions described in this week’s stories about Jesus.

Engage

The Bible story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship space and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of Mark. Explain that on this last Sunday before Easter we will hear stories from the gospel of Mark about Jesus’ last week with his friends.

Holy Week stories Distribute a copy of the resource sheet “[Holy Week Stories](#)” (based on **Mark 1–11** and **Mark 14:1–15:47**) to each storyteller and have them take their places at the stations. Introduce participants to the process of moving through the stations, pausing after each one for a moment of silent reflection before moving to the next station. If there are more than 12 participants, form another group or two, each one beginning after the previous group leaves the first station.

The Bible story and us

After all have finished hearing the stories, gather again as a whole group and share the bread and juice as a way of remembering the last time Jesus ate with his friends before he died. Discuss together the following questions and/or invite other questions, being open to what participants want to discuss.

- **What emotions did you hear about in each story?**
- **What do you wonder about?**
- **Why do you think it is important for us to remember these stories?**

Remind participants that this is not the end of the story of Jesus. Next week, on Easter Sunday, we will hear what happened next.

Respond

Review the choices of activities and invite the group to choose one or more zones in which to participate. Encourage older group members to help younger group members in each zone.

- ❑ **Art zone: Painting emotions** Sometimes it is easier to express emotions with colours and shapes than it is with words. Invite participants to use the art supplies to create abstract drawings or paintings to express all the emotions that they heard in the stories of Holy Week or felt in themselves as they listened to the stories. Consider displaying the pieces in the sanctuary during the coming week.
- ❑ **Meditation zone: Holy Week reflections** Invite participants to prepare a calendar for reflecting on the events of Holy Week during the coming week at home. Provide copies of the resource sheet "[Holy Week Reflections](#)" to glue onto construction paper. If time permits, invite older participants to add a drawing to each section to illustrate the word for the day. Then have them cut apart the days of the week strips, pile these in order, and staple together to take home. Encourage them to pull one strip off per day to read together as a family or as individuals during the coming week. 
- ❑ **Clay zone: Holy Week symbols** Participants are invited to create their own symbols to remember the stories of Holy Week. Distribute modelling clay and invite participants to make one or more symbols to represent the stories from the focus passage. These can be used at home to
- re-tell the story or as a prayer symbol for quiet times. Older participants can write a prayer to go with each symbol.
- ❑ **Game zone: Holy Week game** Invite participants to play a matching game to remember the Holy Week stories. Distribute sets of cards and invite participants to form pairs. Have each pair take turns turning over two cards at a time to try to find pairs of symbols, or make up their own games. As the symbols are revealed, encourage participants to remember as much as they can of that part of the story. Have them take sets of cards home to play with their families.
- ❑ **Bible zone: Holy Week readings** This zone is particularly for older youth and adults who would like to explore all the lections for this day. Distribute Bibles and copies of the [biblical background material](#). Invite a volunteer to read the commentary on the focus passage. Discuss: What new thoughts come to you? What is surprising in this commentary? What is affirming? Then invite other volunteers to take turns reading **Psalm 31:9–16**, **Isaiah 50:4–9a**, and **Philippians 2:5–11** and the commentary for each passage. Discuss: How does each of these passages connect with the stories of Jesus' last week? 

Bless

Gather again in the worship space and light the candle.

Pray a prayer of your own or invite a volunteer to read the prayer on the [biblical background](#) page.

Sing or listen to "Comfort Me" (pp. 12–13 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #14 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Send participants out with the following blessing: "As you go, remember that God always loves us, during both the good times and the times that are hard." Distribute the rest of the copies of the resource sheet "[Holy Week Stories](#)" to participants and encourage them to read these at home with their families during the coming week.

Reflect

In what ways was each age group able to connect with the stories of Holy Week? Save the seven symbols to use on Easter Sunday next week in a review of this week's stories.



STORY 1 (*perfume jar*) Jesus and his followers were in Bethany, staying at the house of Simon, the one with the terrible skin disease. A woman took a jar of expensive ointment to that house and poured it over Jesus' head. Some of those watching got upset. "What a waste!" they said. "We could have used that money to feed lots of hungry people." Jesus stopped those comments. "She has given me a very special gift. There will always be poor people and you can always help them. But you will not always have me. She will be remembered forever for what she has done." (Mark 14:3-9)

STORY 2 (*tree branch*) The day that Jesus and his friends left Bethany and arrived in Jerusalem was so exciting! The whole city greeted Jesus like a king. Some people threw their cloaks on the road and others covered the road with leafy branches they had cut in the fields to make a pathway. Everyone was shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of God! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Mark 11:1-11)

STORY 3 (*bread and juice*) That evening it was the time of the celebration of Passover and Jesus had sent two disciples up to Jerusalem to prepare a room. During the meal, Jesus suddenly said, "One of you will betray me." Everyone was shocked. "Not me!" Then Jesus took a loaf of bread, gave thanks to God, and broke it, saying, "Take this...this is my body." He took a glass of wine and said, "This is the cup of blessing, which is poured out for many." At the end of the meal, everyone sang a song, and then went to the Mount of Olives together. (Mark 14:12-26)

STORY 4 (*rock*) Jesus and the disciples went to a garden called Gethsemane. Jesus went on a bit further with Peter, James, and John. He threw himself on the ground and began to pray. Jesus prayed a long time, so long that they fell asleep. Three times Jesus woke them up and asked the three disciples to stay awake and pray with him, and every time they fell asleep

again. Suddenly, there were people everywhere carrying swords and clubs. They were led by the chief priests and Judas, one of the disciples. Jesus was arrested. Most of his friends were so scared they ran away. (Mark 14:26-50)

STORY 5 (*rooster*) Later that night Jesus was taken to the high priest to be questioned. When a servant girl saw Jesus' friend Peter sitting in the courtyard she said, "You were with Jesus." Peter said, "I don't know what you're talking about!" Just then a rooster crowed. The girl pointed at Peter again, saying, "I'm sure this man is one of Jesus' followers." Peter said, "No I'm not!" Then another person said, "You must be - you sound just like them." Peter shouted, "I don't know Jesus!"

A rooster crowed again and Peter suddenly remembered what Jesus had said: "Peter, you will deny me three times before the rooster crows twice." Peter covered his face with his hands and cried. (Mark 14:66-72)

STORY 6 (*cross or poster*) The rest of that night and the next day was such a scary, sad time. After the chief priests had questioned

Jesus, they sent him to Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate asked the crowd what to do with Jesus and Jesus' friends listened in horror as everyone shouted, "Crucify him!" Two women named Mary and Salome stood nearby, watching and waiting during the rest of that long and terrible day. When Jesus was crucified the day became dark and when he died the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom. A soldier, who was standing at the foot of the cross, said, "Truly this one really was sent from God!" (Mark 15:1-40)

STORY 7 (*white fabric*) Joseph of Arimathea, a respected Jewish council member, asked Pilate for permission to bury Jesus' body. Joseph brought a linen cloth and wrapped Jesus' body in it. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus watched as Joseph laid the body in a small cave. A large rock was rolled across to seal the doorway of the tomb. (Mark 15:42-47)

HOLY WEEK STORIES

(based on Mark 11:1-11 and Mark 14:1-15:47)



Holy Week Reflections

Sunday March 28, 2021

Word for the day: *Celebrate*

Read Mark 11:8–10.

People celebrated Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem. Think of something you celebrate in your life today. Thank God for it.

Monday March 29, 2021

Word for the day: *Love*

Read Mark 14:3–9.

A woman gave Jesus a special and beautiful gift. Do something nice for someone today.

Tuesday March 30, 2021

Word for the day: *Food*

Read Mark 14:16–17.

Jesus ate a last meal with his friends. Think about special meals you eat with your family. What makes them special?

Wednesday March 31, 2021

Word for the day: *Prayer*

Read Mark 14:32.

Jesus prayed during a difficult time. Write a two-sentence prayer that you can pray any time.

Thursday April 1, 2021

Word for the day: *Afraid*

Read Mark 14:72.

Peter was afraid to say that he was Jesus' friend. Think about a time when it was hard to stand up for one of your friends. Write down something you could do differently another time.

Friday April 2, 2021

Word for the day: *Hatred*

Read Mark 15:12–14.

The crowds that cheered for Jesus when he arrived in Jerusalem now shouted for his death. Where do you see hatred in the world today? Say a prayer for people everywhere who are victims of other people's hatred.

Saturday April 3, 2021

Word for the day: *Grief*

Read Mark 15:46–47.

Jesus' friends buried his body in a stone tomb. They were filled with grief. Pray for people who are grieving today.

