

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 29 March 2026 - Palm Sunday

Lectionary Readings (*depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on*)

Matthew 21.1-11; Psalm 118.1-2, 19-29 (Liturgy of Palms); Isaiah 50.4-9a; Psalm 31.9-16 [or 31. 9-18] Philippians 2.5-11; Matthew 26.14 - end of chapter 27; [or Matthew 27.11-54] (Liturgy of Passion)

Homily

Today's homily has been written by Dr Mel Eyeons, LLM, St Benedict, Cambridge Benefice

Palm Sunday is complicated.

It's the day when we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem on the back of a donkey and being greeted by cheering crowds like he's a triumphant king.

Indeed, this story is referred to as The Triumphal Entry.

But kings generally ride big horses with gleaming coats and fancy ornaments. Borrowed farm animals don't have the same effect.

Yet Jesus chooses a donkey. This is, of course, a sign of humility, and it's an indication of the kind of king Jesus is. He's not one who rules through power and might, but through love and service.

The donkey has another role, though.

Matthew, always keen to show how Jesus fulfils Jewish prophecies, points out to us the words of Zechariah 9.9 that foretell the Messiah coming to Jerusalem on a donkey.

So, in coming on a donkey, Jesus was unmistakeably saying that he was the Messiah, come to Jerusalem at last. And, as the following verse of Zechariah says, he will bring peace and rule over the whole world, so it's no wonder that the people were excited.

The crowds wave palm branches as a sign of victory and cry out "Hosanna!", literally meaning "Save us!", in a challenge to their Roman rulers.

Our king is here, they say, forget the emperor.

The Messiah will kick him out and make us strong and free, and put us in our rightful place ruling over the world.

But we read this story in the shadow of the week to come.

Jesus, it turns out, isn't interested in being an earthly king who will throw out the hated Roman occupiers and take over their palaces.

He's not looking for an earthly throne or political influence.

He's a king who serves and loves and suffers, and he calls on his followers to do the same.

This must have led to disappointment for many, and disappointment can quickly turn to anger.

And anger, in turn, can sometimes lead to betrayal.

The main person who comes to mind at this point is of course Judas. He's the one who gives Jesus up to the authorities for money and betrays his Lord with a kiss.

Even as he sits and eats the Last Supper with Jesus and the other disciples, he's already turned against Jesus in his heart.

There are other betrayals, though.

Peter, James and John go with Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemane but can't stay awake to support Jesus as he agonises in prayer.

When Jesus is arrested, all the disciples desert him and flee.

And Peter, although a little braver and able to go to where Jesus is taken, eventually denies his Master three times.

Then, there's Pilate, who betrays the principles of justice that he's meant to uphold, so that he doesn't have to deal with unrest in this difficult situation.

And the religious authorities also betray law and justice, while using the hated Romans to get rid of a thorn in their side.

Jesus even wonders, at his lowest point, if his own Father has betrayed him.

So, betrayal is at the heart of the tragedy that's about to unfold.

And betrayal is perhaps one of the hardest things human beings can face. We can only be betrayed by someone we're close to, someone we trust and have made ourselves vulnerable to.

When that faith in others is damaged, it can become hard to have faith in anyone or anything.

This is why, as it happens, hurt caused by the Church is so hard to bear: we trust our churches to be places of love and safety, and when they're not it cuts to the core.

The followers of Jesus had different reactions to their betrayals.

Judas couldn't live with it, or himself, and took his own life before finding out how things would really turn out.

It's a sad end, for surely, he could've come back to Jesus even then and received mercy and compassion.

Peter, ashamed, went back to what he knew, his old job of fishing, probably trying to keep busy to avoid the guilt.

Yet we know that Jesus will seek him out after the Resurrection and restore him.

We know that all the disciples, despite having to live with what they've done, are met with and loved by Jesus and sent out to proclaim the Gospel.

For the rest of us, though, betrayal can be harder to let go of.

It may take months or years or even a whole lifetime of prayer and striving.

Reconciliation, which is not the same as forgiveness, may not be possible, for safety or other reasons.

But we can see God at work in the desire and the attempts to forgive, heal and move on in safe ways, for God is patient with us and understands everything.

And we can turn to God for comfort and help in our struggles from one who experienced many betrayals from both his closest friends and the upholders of law and order.

And what of our own betrayals, of other people and of God?

We all have things we're ashamed of, that we are reluctant to face, and it can be painful to admit our faults and errors.

But let's not make the same mistake as Judas of thinking that God's grace and forgiveness are too small to deal with our failings.

Instead, may we all return to God, and find him cooking fish for us on the shore, eager to talk with us, restore us, and send us out for him and his kingdom of love, mercy and service.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested intercessions

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father, your son entered Jerusalem to praise and shouts of hosanna. We thank you now for the salvation that his passion has brought us and ask that you strengthen our faith and make us bold witnesses to your forgiving love.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer

King of the nations, you have exalted your son to your right hand and given him all authority in heaven and on earth. Guide those who lead the nations that they may show wisdom, justice and compassion to all and hold on to what is true and right.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer

Friend of the friendless, you came to teach us to love one another. Help us reach out to the community in which we live, especially those in it who are lonely, sad or afraid, and grant that our life together may reflect your loving care.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer

Healer of our diseases, your Son bore all our sicknesses in his body on the cross. Remember those who suffer and are afflicted, in body, mind or spirit, and grant them healing and peace according to your gracious will.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer

Giver of life, receive our praise and thanks this day for all who have left this life and yet still live in you. Bring us to share with them and all your people the marriage feast of the Lamb, and comfort those who mourn.

Merciful Father...

Suggested hymns/songs

All glory, laud and honour

All hail the power of Jesus' name

And can it be

At the name of Jesus

Christ is made the sure foundation

Give me joy in my heart

Hosanna, hosanna

Make way, make way

Ride on, ride on in majesty

O sacred head, sore wounded

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)