

Introduction to the day

This week, the center of the church's year, is one of striking contrasts: Jesus rides into Jerusalem surrounded by shouts of glory, only to be left alone to die on the cross, abandoned by even his closest friends. Mark's gospel presents Jesus in his complete human vulnerability: agitated, grieved, scared, forsaken. Though we lament Christ's suffering and all human suffering, we also expect God's salvation: in the wine and bread, Jesus promises that his death will mark a new covenant with all people. We enter this holy week thirsty for the completion of God's astonishing work.

PROCESSIONAL GOSPEL: Mark 11:1-11

BLESSING OF PALMS

PROCESSION *All Glory, Laud, and Honor*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

As we now enter into the contemplation of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and meditate on the salvation of the world through his sufferings, death, burial, and resurrection, let us pray.

Everlasting God, in your endless love for the human race you sent our Lord Jesus Christ to take on our nature and to suffer death on the cross. In your mercy enable us to share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 50:4-9a

A reading from Isaiah.

The image of the servant of God is one of the notable motifs in the book of Isaiah. Today's reading describes the mission of the servant, whom early Christians associated with Jesus. Like Jesus, the servant does not strike back at his detractors but trusts in God's steadfast love.

PSALM: Psalm 31:9-16

Into your hands, O LORD, I commend my spirit. (Ps. 31:5)

SECOND READING: Philippians 2:5-11

A reading from Philippians.

Christ did not act to attain status and glory but was obedient to God even to the point of death. Following Christ's example, we do not seek personal status or glory but care for others as God cared for us in Christ's death.

GOSPEL: Mark 14:1--15:47

The passion story in Mark's gospel presents Jesus as one who dies abandoned by all. He shows himself to be the true Son of God by giving his life for those who have forsaken him.

GOSPEL MESSAGE

SUNDAY OF THE PASSION / PALM SUNDAY

The Heart of the Story

Martin Luther called the Psalms a “little Bible.” He wrote that all the rest of the Holy Scriptures could be found in them. Luther went so far as to suggest that in the Psalms the church can glimpse the death and resurrection of Christ. In these ancient songs and prayers of the Hebrew people, every human emotion is laid bare: joy and contentment, anger and sorrow, hope and despair. The Psalms give voice to the wide spectrum of experiences that mark our human lives. This is their power—they speak the heart’s language, turbulent as our hearts may sometimes be.

In a similar way, Holy Week places us at the center of the whole story of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. From the “hosannas” of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem to the seeming abandonment of the cross, emotions run high this week as the story of Christ’s passion reaches into the depths of our human experience. The palm and passion stories are themselves a “little Bible” of salvation for the church within the wider story of God’s saving love for all.

As we gather to hear the story of Christ’s passion anew, the words and rituals of the church’s worship life invite us to feel our way into this story from the inside out. We hear the shouts of blessing and come to the Passover in quiet hope. We follow to Gethsemane and to the cross, with mixed emotions. What does betrayal feel like in our bodies? What about amazement? Fear? How have we experienced ridicule or shame? How have we ourselves dismissed or derided others?

The palm and passion stories offer us a chance to contemplate Christ’s sufferings and meditate on our salvation—to come side by side with Christ’s passion and so to know and access our own. We are invited to honestly glimpse the workings of our own hearts. Nothing is off limits to God’s grace. No human experience is untouched by the story of God’s redemptive love.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Trusting in God’s promise to reconcile all things, let us pray for the church, the well-being of creation, and a world in need.

Blessed One, today the church sings glad hosannas as we enter Holy Week. Prepare us to bear witness to Christ’s suffering and death endured for our sake. Gather your people around the cross and comfort us with resurrection hope. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Renew your good creation and protect the balance of life on earth. Encourage the work of foresters, scientists, arborists, gardeners, and river keepers. We pray for the health of pollinating insects, songbirds, and native plants. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Establish peace and justice among the nations especially in Ukraine and the Holy Land. Hold to account any with authority to judge others. Grant that courts, legislatures, and local governments will serve with integrity and compassion. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Bring hope to any who feel forsaken or forgotten. Make a way for refugees and asylum seekers. Reunite families enduring separation. We pray for any who are incarcerated, institutionalized, or in foster care, that they may know your love. Give comfort to those who are ill, especially Sandra Gagnon, Karen Weigold, Keith Weckwerth, Karen O’Day, Shirley Glickman, Marilyn Schneider, Denita Wolfgram, Stephanie Yourth, Christopher Yourth, Linda Boland, Peter Howell, Glenda Panke, Mark Bimm, Harold Yourth, Irene Churchill, Debbie Thom, Donna L Hoffman, Walter Hobden, Doug Holly, Gary Churchill and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. In this moment of silence we name out loud or in the quiet of our hearts those who need your healing touch. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Give energy and joy to our Pastor Ralph, worship leaders, and musicians. Bless baptismal candidates, their sponsors, confirmands, and teachers. Watch over those who travel. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Blessed One, our times are in your hand. Sustain us in discipleship throughout our lives and receive us into everlasting life. **Your mercy is great.**

Accompany us on our journey, God of grace, and receive the prayers of our hearts, through Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

DISMISSAL