Sacred Space: A Resource for Small-group Ministry

Year A

Focus: Palm Sunday

Scripture: Matthew 21:1–11 NRSV

Gathering
Welcome

On Palm Sunday we focus on the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Jesus enters the city astride a donkey as a symbol of the unexpected nature of God’s reign.

Prayer for Peace

*Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.*
*Light the peace candle.*

Gracious and loving God,

As we lay palms at your feet we pray for peace. Peace that triumphs over darkness. Peace that ebbs and flows in the lives of all those who see and receive it. Peace that makes all people shout in jubilation, like the people who saw you on a donkey and shouted, “Hosanna!” Peace that rests in stones that would shout if the people did not. Let that peace spread as people hear our shouts and see our reactions to you. As we enter into Holy Week, walk with us, God, so that we may take time this week to share peace with the world. Amen

—Caleb and Tiffany Brian

Spiritual Practice

Body Prayer

Say aloud: Today our spiritual practice will be a body prayer. Show the group members three postures they will experience for this spiritual exercise:

* First posture—head bowed with hands folded
* Second posture—sitting or standing with arms stretched outward
* Third posture—both hands clasped over the heart.

Say: “A chime will signal when to move into the next posture. You will not offer any words of prayer. Instead focus on sensing what type of prayer wants to emerge from you as you hold each posture.”

Lead the group in three deep, cleansing breaths as preparation. Ring a chime.
First posture: Bow your head and fold your hands (one minute). Ring a chime.
Second posture: Sit or stand with your arms stretched outward (one minute). Ring a chime.
Third posture: Clasp your hands over your heart (one minute). Ring a chime.
Close with a spoken “Amen.”
Invite participants to share what they experienced as they engaged in the body prayer.

Sharing Around the Table
Matthew 21:1–11 NRSV

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

“Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Matthew’s account fulfills the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 NRSV:

Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Donkeys were symbols of peacemaking; horses were symbols of battle. Spreading cloaks and tree branches on the road was a way to honor Jesus.

In Matthew, the crowd hails Jesus as the “Son of David,” a phrase used by one of the blind men in the previous story. The title is not used often in the Bible. It can refer to a descendant of King David or someone who is as great and powerful as David, the warrior-king. The crowd uses the title as part of its desire for a Messiah who would deliver the people (Hosanna, save us!) through a political and military triumph over the Romans.
Matthew closes his account by providing an image of the entire city in turmoil over Jesus’ arrival. The crowds misunderstand Jesus’ role as a prophetic warrior-king. Jesus’ purpose is greater, wider, and more lasting than a military victory. Jesus is ushering in God’s reign.

Questions

1. Jesus enters Jerusalem as an expression of humility and peace, but the crowds anticipated a warrior-king. When has your understanding of who Jesus is been transformed in unexpected ways?
2. The Jews understood “salvation” in terms of liberating people from oppressive foreign rule. How does that inform your understanding of salvation?
3. When have you cried out, “Hosanna” (save us)?

Sending
Generosity Statement

Note: If you are using “Thoughts for Children,” make time for the children to share their artwork with the group during this portion of the gathering.

Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:9

The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing, small-group ministries as part of your generous response. This offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

God of rejoicing, We share with joy-filled hearts in response to the presence of your Son. May the offerings we share bring joy, hope, love, and peace into the lives of others that they might experience your mercy and grace. Amen

Invitation to Next Meeting

Closing Hymn

CCS 469, “Sanna, Sannanina”

Closing Prayer

Optional Additions, Depending on Group

- Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
- Thoughts for Children
Prayer for Peace

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Light the peace candle.

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Communion Statement

Choose one scripture to read from this selection: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–39.

Invitation to Communion

All are welcome at Christ’s table. The Lord’s Supper, or Communion, is a sacrament in which we remember the life, death, resurrection, and continuing presence of Jesus Christ. In Community of Christ, we also experience Communion as an opportunity to renew our baptismal covenant and to be formed as disciples who live Christ’s mission. Others may have different or added understandings within their faith traditions. We invite all who participate in the Lord’s Supper to do so in the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

On this Palm Sunday let us meet Jesus at the table, sharing Communion as an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community. In preparation let’s sing Community of Christ Sings 523, “As We Gather at Your Table.”
Thoughts for Children

Materials: welcome mat or picture of a welcome mat, paper, crayons or markers

Say: This is a welcome mat. Where do we usually find a welcome mat? Encourage the children to respond.

We usually find a welcome mat at the front door. It is called a welcome mat because it “welcomes” people as they come into our home.

Today we are talking about Jesus being welcomed as he entered the city of Jerusalem. People gathered along the road, and as he came near they waved palm branches and shouted “Hosanna!” This was their way of welcoming Jesus.

What are some ways you welcome people when they visit?
What would you put on your welcome mat? Encourage children to share.
Hand out paper and crayons. Ask the children to draw what they would like to see on a welcome mat. Show the pictures as the group closes your time together.