

Palm Sunday / Passion Sunday – Year C

Sunday 13 April 2025

The Faith Action Programme would like to thank Wendy Lloyd, former Faith Communications Coordinator – Nations and Church Relations Team at Christian Aid, for her archive material from 2022 for Palm Sunday.

Weekly Worship, based on the Revised Common Lectionary, is for everyone – in any capacity – who is involved in creating and leading worship.

It provides liturgical material that can be used for worship in all settings. Our writers are asked to share their approaches to creating and delivering this material to equip leaders with a greater confidence and ability to reflect on their own worship practice and experience and encourage them to consider how this material might be adapted for their own context.

We would encourage continual reflection on the changing patterns of worship and spiritual practice that are emerging from disruption and how this might help identify pathways towards development and worship renewal.

We may not all be gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we are invited to worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship.

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Introduction

The Weekly Worship notes created for Lent have been prepared as a partnership project between Operation Noah, Eco-Congregation Scotland, Young Christian Climate Network, Quakers in Britain and Christian Aid.

They have been prepared through the lens of a question inspired by Micah 6:8: What does it mean to walk humbly with God while seeking to do justice and love kindness?

Each of these organisations has a long history of doing justice, loving kindness and walking in pursuit of God's will for all of Creation. They have learned, through long walks for peace and pilgrimages, to climate change talks and marching with placards, that walking provides the opportunity to embody our prayer as action.

Lent is not equally observed in all churches, but the ideas of reflection and repentance are familiar to all Christians. Pilgrimage has a history of being a penitential undertaking, but has evolved over the years to become so much more. It is literally, walking humbly with our God.

As the General Assembly has affirmed:

“Affirm the place of pilgrimage within the life of the church and encourage congregations to explore opportunities for pilgrimage locally and how to provide practical and spiritual support for pilgrims passing through the parish.”

“Instruct the Church and Society Council, in partnership with the Mission and Discipleship Council and others to develop resources to support pilgrimage in Scotland.” – *General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 2017.*

Week 6 in Lent provides us with the choice of engaging with the Palm Sunday readings or with the Passion readings as provided by the Revised Common Lectionary.

If there are quite a few people who are unlikely to attend services during Holy Week but only attend the Easter Sunday services then you might wish to include the Passion Narrative.

Liturgy of the Palms: The entry into Jerusalem, Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Luke 19:28-40.

Liturgy of the Passion: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22:14-23:56 or Luke 23:1-49.

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

This psalm is set for Palm Sunday in all three years of the Revised Common Lectionary. A variation of the verses from the psalm are set for Easter Sunday itself (vv1-2, 14-24).

It is a psalm that Jesus would have been familiar with as He rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, experiencing the festal procession for which the branches are bound and the blessings are proclaimed.

It is a psalm abundant in thanksgiving and appreciation – the phrase ‘give thanks’ or a reference to thanksgiving, is mentioned five times, it is a repeated refrain throughout the passage. This thanksgiving is poured out in response to the goodness and salvation of the Lord and the steadfast love of God – a love which bookends the passage in verses 1,2 and 29.

In the middle of all these words of praise and appreciation sits the cornerstone verse: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” (v22). The one who received such adoration and praise one weekend was rejected and killed by the next one.

Yet if we can listen past the hollowness, we might feel as we hear these words, we can hear the echoes of genuine hope. For those who echoed this psalm by lining the streets of Jerusalem to welcome Jesus’ arrival on a colt with palm branches and blessings, really hoped that Jesus was their salvation and liberation.

The refrain: “His steadfast love endures forever” could become a powerful phrase for our walk through Holy Week.

[Luke 19:28-40](#)

The following is an excerpt from Sally Foster-Fulton’s reflection on Luke 19:28-40 for Palm Sunday from the *Walking Humbly* podcast, broadcast in 2022.

The first people who heard this story would certainly have known it. Every single one of them. Jesus's little ragtag procession would have been a blip on the screen compared to what was going on at the other side of town.

At the other side of town, Pontius Pilate was entering Jerusalem, coming in from the coast with 600 foot-soldiers, horses, armour, banners and flags and standards bearing great carved golden eagles, the symbol of Roman authority, and beating drums.

The cadence of heavy footfall in Jerusalem during Passover would have been teeming with Jewish pilgrims and then a hotbed of tension. Rome wanted Israel to be in no doubt about who was in charge. Can you imagine it? The cheers would have been eerily similar to the ones we think of when we remember Palm Sunday. After all, Caesar was Rome's prince of Peace.

Caesar was Rome's son of God, and Pontius Pilate was his representative. And then came Jesus down the Mount of Olives on a donkey, on an agricultural tool, not a war machine. The imagery couldn't have been clearer. I am for peace.

The triumphal entry was a send-up, a parody of Pilate's grand procession, a mockery of it. And it wasn't an accident, either. It was a staged demonstration. So today we follow in a long line of holy protests; Jesus's disciples claim that real power and authority sat with peace.

"So what?", some might say, "So what, if there were two parades? What does that matter?" Well, I think it matters because there are always two parades, aren't there?

And we have to decide which one we will join. When we choose to forgive or not, we choose a certain path. When we choose what we will do with our money, our energy, our love, we walk a certain way.

[Isaiah 50:4-9a](#)

In this passage we find the tools that have resourced the servant Isaiah through trials and suffering.

Verses 4-5 convey a close listening and openness to hear from God, morning by morning. This is an inspiration to us all, including those who preach on a regular basis, to hear and share "words to sustain the weary."

Verse 6 serves as a focus for the passage in the context of Palm/Passion Sunday. Christians read this as a prophecy for the trial and torture of Jesus. Such a non-violent response to provocation and torment is made possible by what we find in verse 7, by finding help in God: "I have set my face like flint" – setting an intention from the outset that enables non-violent endurance and overcoming.

The rhetorical questions of verses 8 and 9 reinforce this intention and hope – they also convey a confidence which compliments the non-violent response of verse 6. This is not a cowering and subdued endurance, but a knowing resilience and a determined resistance.

Psalm 31:9-16

This is an honest prayer before God, uttered from the depths of suffering.

Distress, grief, sorrow, sighing, misery, scorn, horror, dread, broken and terror are the honest words, from verses 9-13, to describe the lived experience of the one who prays this psalm.

This is a raw and real prayer and offers a template for how we can bring our full selves and all our feelings before God in our personal devotion and in our worship.

The final three verses, as is the pattern of most prayers of lament, offer the hope and trust. Lament is a ‘protest so deep that it must become a prayer, for only God can provide the needed hope that justice will prevail and that the future will be different’ (1).

The words of the final verse, “Let your face shine upon your servant”, can serve as an echo and reminder of the Aaronic blessing that will have been sung over many of us at baptism. A comforting and tender reminder of how we are held during life’s toughest trials.

[1] Rachel’s Cry: Prayer of lament and rebirth of hope, Kathleen D Billman and Daniel L Migliore, The Pilgrim Press, 1999, p2.

Philippians 2:5-11

On this last Sunday of Lent, where we have journeyed with the theme of Walking Humbly, this passage takes us to the heart of the matter – it demonstrates a gold standard in humility.

The writer of Philippians is setting up the choices of Christ as the model for community living. Not to grab for power and position, but rather to be servants of each other.

Far from being a passive humbling by circumstance, verses 5-8 outline the conscious choices made by Jesus to humble Himself, even unto death. This is an empowering humility.

Humility is embodied, just as Christ took on human form. Walking humbly is an active intention, we have put one foot in front of the other to journey with and towards humility, as we have sought to walk with God through Lent.

Humility is both an action and an attitude. Walking humbly with our God involves being open to God's accompanying presence to draw our attention to the things around us and within us, informing and transforming our action in the world.

In this passage, the consequence of authentic humility is elevation and exaltation – this is a consequence and not a motivation.

The work of healthy humbling is empowering, embodied and intentional. To take on the mind of Christ is to set our intention to make choices to recognise our power and privilege and to use it wisely, if at all.

[Luke 22:14-23:56](#) and [Luke 23:1-49](#)

If the entire Passion Narrative is to be read as part of the service, it may be enough to tell the story in place of a sermon – using a number of different voices, possibly as a dramatic reading.

Sermon ideas

- In the context of the evolving conflict in Europe – this having been written on the day Russia invaded Ukraine [in 2022] – it may be appropriate to highlight the themes of non-violence and messages of peace that Jesus demonstrated in the entry into Jerusalem and in the psalm, as well as consider how we might respond with effective non-violent action against the powers that are set on war and destruction.
- Pastoral themes within the sermon include encouraging us to notice how the hope and celebration of Palm Sunday can be hard to recognise when things get difficult or don't work out as we expect. Yet despite it all it is in those challenging and suffering times that God is present. You could explore this with stories of being held by hope despite personal, local and global stories of suffering. Visit christianaid.org.uk for some global examples.

Prayers

Call to worship

We gather to seek God
to praise the Creator
to adore the Son
to abide in the Spirit.

To give thanks to the Lord
for He is good.

God's steadfast love endures forever

We gather on this last Sunday of Lent
to share in the praise of Palm Sunday
to anticipate the events of Holy Week
to journey towards the cross and tomb.

To give thanks to the Lord
for He is good.

God's steadfast love endures forever

We gather together
bringing all the worries and wonders of the world
bringing all that is heavy in our hearts or light in our souls
bringing all the joys and challenges of life
whatever our circumstances.

To give thanks to the Lord
for He is good.

God's steadfast love endures forever

Amen

Prayer of lament

God of Creation
we cry to You from the depths
of creation's destruction.

How long will rivers and lakes
be contaminated?
How long will forests be destroyed?
Jeopardizing the lives of indigenous,
afro and peasant families
who need these resources of Your creation
to enjoy a dignified life.
God of creation, hear our voice.

God of Justice
we cry to You from the depths
of injustice and abuse.

How long will we be afraid
to denounce the activities
which weigh most heavily
on families and communities
who are destitute or poor?
How long will our silence
put countless virtuous lives at risk;
our brothers and sisters
whom You call us to care for and protect?
God of justice, hear our voice.

God of Life
we cry to You from the depths
of inhumanity and neglect.

How long will a lack of solidarity
and absence of compassion
bring pain to those who suffer
hunger, disease, abandonment and
loss of their rights and freedom?
Forgive our selfishness and insensitivity
that causes sadness and anguish
in many families and communities.
God of life, hear our voice.

(Moises Gonzalez, Christian Aid, Rage and Hope, SPCK 2021)

Prayer for Palm Sunday

O Christ, You entered the city as a poor man
not in style but simply,
yet still You caused uproar, and questions everywhere;
You drew the expectations of a hungry crowd,
and brought buried conflicts to the light.
May we, who are sometimes swayed by the crowd's approval,
and who often avoid conflict
for fear of its cost to us,
hold fast to the gospel of peace and justice
and follow faithfully in Your way of compassion and solidarity
with those who are poor and excluded,
wherever it may lead us.
Amen.

(By Kathy Galloway included in Christian Aid reflection and prayers for April 2017)

Ride on Lord Jesus.
Upon a colt,
over cloaks,
under branches –
ride on Lord Jesus.

Towards a city,
through its gates,
past the crowds –
ride on Lord Jesus.

As Hosannas fade
and enemies sneer,
as danger closes
and friends falter –
ride on Lord Jesus.

Showing the way,
teaching the truth,
bringing life for all.
In the name of the Lord –
ride on Lord Jesus.

(Christian Aid Monthly reflections and prayers, 2014)

Further Resources

- Sign up to receive monthly e-mails about new worship and prayer resources from Christian Aid <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/pray/pray-with-us/worship-resources-sign-up>
- Christian Aid Prayer Diary <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/pray/faith-resources/prayer-diary>
- Christian Aid Climate Justice campaign: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns>
- Visit our partners' websites for further ideas for action:
 - Eco-Congregation Scotland <https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/>
 - Operation Noah <https://operationnoah.org/>
 - Young Christian Climate Network <https://www.yccn.uk/>
 - Quakers in Britain <https://www.quaker.org.uk/>

Musical suggestions

God Welcomes All (GWA) is the new supplement to Church Hymnary Fourth Edition. This exciting new collection features over 200 hymns and songs in a wide range of styles by writers from Scotland and around the world.

The full music and words-only versions are now available; and digital resources including the expansion of the existing Church of Scotland music website, will be published in due course, with streaming functions and further information on each song; backing tracks; and lyric videos. *God Welcomes All* is available to order from <https://chbookshop.hymnsam.co.uk/books/9781786225573/god-welcomes-all>

Our [online music resource](#) is on the Church of Scotland website; you can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship. You will also find playlists for this week and liturgical seasons and themes on the *Weekly Worship* and *Inspire Me* tabs.

You can find further musical suggestions for this week in a range of styles on the [Songs for Sunday blog](#) from Trinity College Glasgow.

- GWA 115– “Praise is rising” – a prayerful song of hope, praise and restoration
- A suggested playlist of songs from CH4 throughout Lent can be found on the Church of Scotland website <https://music.churchofscotland.org.uk/inspire-me/playlist/lent>

Reflecting on our worship practice

Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, the way we worship has changed and we need to reflect on the changing or newly established patterns that emerged and continue to emerge as a result of the disruption.

We can facilitate worship for all by exploring imaginative approaches to inclusion, participation and our use of technologies in ways that suit our contexts. This is not an exhaustive list, but some things we could consider are:

- Framing various parts of the worship service in accessible language to help worshippers understand the character and purpose of each part. This is essential for creating worship for all (intergenerational worship) that reflects your community of faith.
- Holding spaces for reflection and encouraging prayer to be articulated in verbal and non-verbal ways, individually and in online breakout rooms.
- In online formats the effective use of the chat function and microphone settings encourages active participation in prayer, e.g. saying the Lord’s Prayer together unmuted, in a moment of ‘holy chaos’.
- If singing in our congregations is restricted, we can worship corporately by using antiphonal psalm readings, creeds and participative prayers.
- Using music and the arts as part of the worship encourages the use of imagination in place of sung or spoken words.
- Use of silence, sensory and kinaesthetic practices allow for experience and expression beyond regular audio and visual mediums.

The following questions might help you develop a habit of reflecting on how we create and deliver content and its effectiveness and impact, and then applying what we learn to develop our practice.

- How inclusive was the worship?

Could the worship delivery and content be described as worship for all/ intergenerational? Was it sensitive to different “Spiritual Styles”?

- How was the balance between passive and active participation?
- How were people empowered to connect with or encounter God?
What helped this? What hindered this?
- How cohesive was the worship?
Did it function well as a whole?
How effective was each of the individual elements in fulfilling its purpose?
- How balanced was the worship?
What themes/topics/doctrines/areas of Christian life were included?
- How did the worship connect with your context/contemporary issues?
Was it relevant in the everyday lives of those attending and in the wider parish/
community?
How well did the worship connect with local and national issues?
How well did the worship connect with world events/issues?
- What have I learned that can help me next time I plan and deliver worship?

Useful links

God Welcomes All can be ordered from [Hymns Ancient & Modern](#)

You can listen to samples of every song in the Church Hymnary 4th edition (CH4) and download a selection of recordings for use in worship [here](#)

You can find an introduction to spiritual styles online [here](#)

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