



Focus scripture
Matthew 21:1–11

Matthew 26:14
—27:66
or Matthew 27:11–54

Additional scriptures
Liturgy of the Palms
Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29
Liturgy of the Passion
Isaiah 50:4–9a
Psalm 31:9–16
Philippians 2:5–11

O God, in our times of loneliness, doubt, and turmoil may we be reminded to entrust ourselves to your unfailing love. Grant us discernment about when to protect ourselves and when to make ourselves vulnerable. Empower us as communities of faith to witness in word and deed to your steadfast, never-failing, liberating, and transforming love.

Palm/Passion Sunday

Palm/Passion Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week. Undergirding the Palm/Passion narrative are different understandings of and responses to Jesus. The narrative illustrates the faithfulness of God and the wavering faithfulness of human beings, yet we are reminded in **Psalm 118:1–2, 19–29** that God’s never-failing love can be trusted. We are not alone – we live and worship in community, which helps define and shape our relationship with God.

Focus scripture: Matthew 21:1–11
Matthew 26:14—27:66

Matthew’s gospel seeks to demonstrate how Jesus’ life fulfills the Hebrew Scriptures. In Matthew 21:5, we hear echoes of Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9.

Matthew 21:1–11 starts in the relative quiet of a hillside and ends in the middle of the main city of Jerusalem in shouting and a melee of palms and pilgrims. The reading is full of anticipation, drama, and contrasts. The disciples and the crowd lay down their cloaks for Jesus in a powerful gesture of adoration and self-sacrifice. This gesture is reversed in **Matthew 26:14—27:66** when the disciples cloak themselves in self-protection and denial. The adulation of Jesus stems from the crowd’s hysteria. It is that same hysteria that will prompt them to shout “Crucify.”

While some churches will celebrate this day as Palm Sunday, marking Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem with shouts of Hosanna, which means “save now, we pray,” other churches observe today as Passion Sunday. **Matthew 26:14—27:66** forms the Passion narrative. Jesus experiences betrayal, physical and emotional violence, mockery, and ultimately, death. The Earth itself reflects the significance of what has happened: the curtain is torn, the temple is split in two, Earth shakes and rocks are split. The foundations have been fractured. The whole Earth protests. It is an event of global significance. It would appear the forces of destruction have had the last say.

The question of Jesus’ identity reverberates through Matthew’s account. “Tell us if you are the Messiah.” As we reflect on the Passion narrative we might ask ourselves how we might have answered had we been there at the time, and what would we answer now? Has the answer changed for us during the course of our lives?

Jesus leans on the scriptures that have preceded him. **Isaiah 50:4–9a** is part of the Servant Song and alludes to the mystery of suffering alongside obedience to God. “I listen to God,” says the author of this passage. I may and do suffer but know I can trust God and I shall hold to my faith knowing that God will honour my trust. I am persecuted but God is with me and that is my comfort. I will not allow shame to enter.

Like Isaiah, the writer of **Psalm 31:9–16** has come to the end of physical and emotional strength, and feels an outcast. Body and mind are assailed; “Terror all around.” These are emotions experienced also by Jesus. Against this utter despair the psalmist, like Isaiah, trusts God and turns to the light of God. In the face of scorn and rejection by humans, God is steadfast.

Philippians 2:5–11 At the core of Jesus’ identity is obedience to and surrender to God, springing from his love for God and God’s love of him. Jesus did not exploit his relationship to God. Jesus models how to be human – we are to become like him, to utterly surrender to God and to shun exploitation of others. The author of the letter to the Philippians says Jesus accordingly has “the name above all names,” and everything in the universe is to be submitted to him. We are reminded of the cataclysmic impact that the crucifixion has on the world, as described in the gospel of Matthew.

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God hears our lament as much as our praise. God will not desert us; God’s presence can be trusted. When have you felt compelled to raise your voice to God and cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In what ways do your words and deeds declare trust and faith that God holds you during all your times?

