

Palm/Passion Sunday

April 13, 2025



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

God is not praised if He is not loved; He is not loved if He does not do good; He does not do good if He is not gracious; He neither is nor can be gracious if He does not forgive sins; and He does not forgive sins except for Christ's sake.

—Martin Luther—

In response to a question, "How, when, and why is God honored and praised?" (January 1, 1532)

John 12:12–19 (processional gospel)

This text calls to mind Old Testament verses from Psalm 118:26–27 and Zechariah 9:9, as well as Jesus' own words from Luke 13:35.

- What do we really mean when we say "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"? How does this point our faith to the one in whom our hope is founded?
- Do you think all the people who were there at the parade on Palm Sunday really knew what they were saying?

Deuteronomy 32:36–39

God will judge Israel's enemies and thereby vindicate them when they finally give up their false gods and control over their lives. When we insist upon being in charge of everything in our lives, we fail to let God be in control.

- Many like to claim that human "free will" is a gift from God, that God cannot overpower. How is our desire for "freedom" over-against God just another example of human sin?

The Hebrew word used here for "power" in verse 36 is *yad*, which literally means "hand." When we think of our hands, we think of the part of our bodies that manipulate our environment, work, and well being. We use our hands for almost everything. We even say things like, "I've got my hands full," or "I need a hand." When we see ourselves as having power, we say: "I have the upper hand."

- Why is it that true faith is not possible until we see that we have no "hand" before God (v.36)?

Scripture uses the word "hand" to challenge our assumptions about who is really in charge of our lives. The problem is that we seek to control every aspect of our existence, rather than letting God be in control. But when we let God be in control of our lives, we are trusting that he will take care of us.

- In what sense is it both a threat and a promise that "there is none that can deliver out of [God's] hand" (v.39)?

Psalms 118:19–29

This psalm is one of a collection of *hallel* songs that were used in ancient Israel as part of the liturgy for the sacrifice of the Passover lambs. The word *hallel* means "praise," as in *hallelujah* ("praise the Lord").

- In what ways in Christian tradition do we recite "hallel" or give thanks and praise to God in a communal way?

- What direct connections or references are there in this psalm to the theme of Palm Sunday?
- How are we like the people who praised Jesus on Palm Sunday, and also like the same people who called for his crucifixion later that same week?

Philippians 2:5–11

Common in literature and folklore are stories of rulers who set aside their royal robes and accoutrements, and walk among their people in disguise.

- How was Jesus like a "king in disguise?" Why did God have to hide his true identity (empty himself) in this love relationship with humanity?

Just think of the advantages that Christ could have used from the many aspects of his divinity for opportunities while walking around as a human on earth. And yet, as Paul tells us, he put those advantages aside. Even though he was fully divine, he did not choose to use or exploit those advantages for his own benefit.

- When have you seen someone be humble as to not take advantage of their position or status? How did that affect you in terms of what you thought about them?
- Scripture says that "every knee shall bow" and "every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (v.10–11). In the end, how will that be true of both Jesus' friends and his enemies?

Luke 22:1–23:56 (passion story)

In the story of Christ's passion we hear at the outset how Judas became a part of the religious leader's secret plan to arrest Jesus, at the prompting of the devil himself. "The chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve." (Luke 22:2–4).

The great irony of this story is that Satan, the deceiver, wanted to thwart the power of Jesus and chose to corrupt the religious leaders and one of Jesus' closest friends to usurp his power. Jesus was betrayed alright, and that betrayal led to the very death that brought about the devil's defeat.

- Compare Hebrews 2:14. By what means did Jesus destroy the power of death and the evil one?
- Most of us have heard this story many times. What part(s) of the Passion narrative jump out at you as you read or hear it this time? Did you discover anything new?