

Daily Discipleship

Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion (B) – Mark 14:1-15:47

The Path of Discipleship: *Beneath the Cross*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to stand in the shadow of the cross?*

word of life

“Then they led him (Jesus) out to crucify him.” Mark 15:20 (NRSV)

Divide the group, and ask each person to silently read one section of the Gospel reading (Mark chapters 14 and 15). Ask each to give a one-sentence summary of their reading as a way to briefly tell the story of Jesus’ death on the cross.

This Sunday begins the holiest of weeks in the church’s liturgical life. Through grand drama and moving liturgy, the faithful enter into the central event of the faith – the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Whether your congregation reads only the traditional Palm Sunday Gospel account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11) or reads the entire account of the Passion (Mark 14-15), the focus of the day remains the same: Jesus comes to die. The triumphal entry on Palm Sunday occurs in the shadow of the cross.

1. *What are your traditions on Palm/Passion Sunday?*
2. *How have these traditions helped you to begin Holy Week?*

It is difficult to study the full passion narrative in one session. Since the account of Jesus’ death is taken from Mark’s Gospel, it is helpful to reflect on the unique themes Mark emphasizes:

Theme 1: Throughout Mark’s Gospel, Jesus has been portrayed as one who acts and teaches with power and authority. Yet throughout the passion narrative, Jesus is stripped of his power, and his voice is silenced. The taunts of the passersby and of those crucified with Jesus (Mark 15:29-32) ring out, “Let the Messiah ... come down from the cross.”

Note as well the increasing loneliness and abandonment of Jesus. The disciples fall asleep while Jesus agonizes in prayer alone. At his arrest, his disciples all abandon him. (One is even seen running away naked to escape the captors – see Mark 14:51.) Peter denies him. Jesus is stripped of his robe and his power. The final words from the dying Jesus are words of powerlessness and abandonment: “My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34 NRSV)

3. *Have you known a time where you felt powerless and abandoned?*
4. *What is the significance of Jesus’ cry on the cross?*

Theme 2: Time and again in Mark’s Gospel, as Jesus performs miracles of healing, he commands those who see and experience these miracles to say nothing about it to anyone until after the resurrection – a theme called the “messianic secret.” Yet as Jesus breathes his final breath, the “secret” is revealed by an unlikely source – the centurion at the foot of the cross – in a bold proclamation of faith, “Truly this man was God’s Son.” (Mark 15:39)

In Jesus’ death is revealed the length and depth of God’s love – a love willing to know utter god-forsakenness so that, no matter the depth of our despair, we can be assured that God is with us.

5. *What is significant about the centurion’s proclamation?*

word *among us*

If you like great drama, this week is for you.

This is a week filled with passion and intrigue, with plots and espionage and political overtones.

If your life is filled with paradox, the story told and lived this week is for you.

A kiss of peace and welcome becomes a sign of betrayal. A guilty man whose name means “Son of the Father” (Barabbas) is set free, and an innocent man – the true “Son of the Father” – is condemned to a cruel death. A Roman centurion – a “pagan” – is the unlikely voice speaking a confession of faith at the foot of the cross. And women – seen as second-class citizens in Jesus’ day – are the only faithful eyewitnesses in the end. Celebration leads to sorrow; cheers lead to jeers. Palm branches lead to a cross; and a Sunday of Palms becomes a week of Passion.

1. *How is life filled with paradox?*

If you have known times of feeling lost and alone, this week is for you.

Jesus agonizes alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. The disciples abandon and betray him. The soldiers mock him. Even the unknown travelers who pass by the cross taunt him. And the final words of Jesus on the cross ring out the depth of abandonment and agony he endures, “My God, why have you forsaken me?”

2. *How do you relate to Jesus?*

If you have known the need to experience forgiveness, this week is for you.

The story experienced during this week called Holy is really our story – our capacity to betray and abandon those we love, our ready acceptance of violence and injustice for a cause, our willingness to ignore suffering and evade responsibility, our acceptance of leaders who act to protect their privilege and position. Yes, we know only too well the sin and brokenness revealed this week in this story of Jesus’ death on the cross.

3. *How does it feel to know we need forgiveness?*

If you have known the need of a savior, this week is for you.

As you hear the voices in the garden and at the supper table; as you hear the cry of the crowd and the weeping of the women at the tomb; as you hear the sounds of sorrow and the silence of loss, listen closely. Listen closely, and you will hear the soft, sweet sound of our salvation. “This is my body ... this is the blood of the covenant, poured out for you.”

4. *When was the first time you realized you needed a savior?*

Yes, this week is for you.

5. *What does this week mean for you?*

6. *How might you set aside this week to focus on the passion story?*

Prayer

Loving God, as I stand this week beneath the shadow of the cross, help me experience anew the depth of your love for me. Amen

Dig Deeper

Read the entire chapters (Mark 14-15)

last word

With each person you meet this week, say in your mind, “Christ died for you.”



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