

Palm Sunday
Ps. 118:1–2, 19–29
Mark 11:1–11 or
John 12:12–16

Passion Sunday
Isa. 50:4–9a
Ps. 31:9–16
Phil. 2:5–11
Mark 14:1–15:47 or
Mark 15:1–39

God's Realm of Peace

Goal for the Session

Through exploring Mark's passion narrative, adults will plan how to model God's realm of peace.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Mark 11:1–11; 15:1–39

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," James D. Ernest

Mark's "many" (11:8) are not simply blessing Jesus in the name of the Lord, nor are they baldly calling Jesus himself Lord; they are blessing him as "the one who comes in the name of the Lord," which leaves his identity ambiguous. Their blessing of the coming kingdom of David suggests that Jesus is being greeted as heir to David's throne. Passersby at the crucifixion reiterate the idea that Jesus would replace the temple (15:29), along with the titles Messiah and king of Israel (15:32). These participants in his execution speak the truth, but they understand it no more than those who hailed him on his entry to Jerusalem.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Margaret A. Farley

The shadow of Good Friday transforms the light of Palm Sunday, for only with them both together do we learn that dignity is sustained with integrity; that the forces of false judgment and suspicion, servile fear and violence, are indeed to be named for what they are and to be resisted, even unto death. But they are not to be resisted by adopting the patterns of evil they represent. Through the death of Jesus, all death is overwhelmed; through the humiliations of Jesus, all humiliation can be transformed.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Michael Battle

Palm Sunday shows us how often we misinterpret God's love, as well as our love for God. The true measure of our love must comprise the capacity to extend ourselves in real acts of compassion toward the afflicted, forcing us to come out of ourselves. So Jesus gets on a jackass and parades among palms toward Jerusalem. This act requires the greatest love. Jesus entering Jerusalem, riding humbly on a donkey, is the miracle of God's complete attention. In Jesus, the world recognizes how different its kind of love is from God's kind of love, and in this recognition—in Jesus—we are transformed from fighting God tooth and nail into creatures who actually love God.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Charles L. Campbell

Jesus hardly appears to be a king at all, and many of the references to him as king are spoken in mockery. But they are profoundly true; they contain a deep, hidden meaning, which is the character of irony. Here the king is the one who eschews domination and violence—and suffers the horrible consequences of that commitment. And here is a kingdom of peace, which, unlike the *Pax Romana* (Peace of Rome), is not coerced and enforced by military power and occupation. Jesus comes to define King or Messiah, rather than traditional understandings of these titles identifying him. This radical reversal is central to the development of Jesus' identity in the passion narrative.

Pax Romana



Pax Romana, or “peace of Rome,” was the two-hundred-year-long period of relative peace and minimal expansion by military force. It was a peace secured by military might. Because they had been at war with one power or another for two hundred years, Romans did not regard peace as the norm. They saw it, not as the absence of war, but as an unusual condition that existed when all opponents had been defeated and could no longer resist.

In this extended period of relatively little conflict, the Romans themselves prospered. But there was a price to be paid, and it was paid by the peoples who were conquered by and under Roman rule. In those lands, it was necessary to keep the peace by exerting repressive control.

In a country under occupation, members of the upper classes of the subjugated people were often coopted as rulers. This allowed the elite to maintain a privileged position while ruling on behalf of the emperor. While this had the appearance of self-rule, it had the effect of quashing any resistance by the people. Herod was an example of this puppet rule.

State-sponsored terrorism was a feature of the Pax Romana, and included mass slaughter (like the slaughter of the innocents when King Herod was seeking the baby said to be born king of the Jews). Thousands were also enslaved. Economic oppression was the rule, with prohibitive taxes exacted by the empire, in part to feed and house the armies of the occupation. The agrarian Jews of Palestine endured the crushing burden of being taxed, not only by the Romans, but also by local governors like Herod and by the religious authorities in the Temple elite. The impact on an agrarian peasant population was devastating. Peasants were forced to sell land—or even family members into debt slavery—in order to pay the tax. Men were forced to seek work far away from the family, leaving women and children in vulnerable positions. The Pax Romana was no peace for the occupied peoples. The people of Palestine could rightly condemn those who cried “peace, peace, when there is no peace.” (Jeremiah 6:13, 8:11; Ezekiel 13:10)

—From information from wikipedia.com and *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* by Joyce Ann Mercer (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 45–48.

On the back of this sheet, respond to the following:

How would you define the difference between peace keeping and peace making?

What was the role of peace keeping in the Pax Romana?

What methods did the Romans and their puppet rulers employ to keep the peace?

What did the Roman rulers expect to maintain by keeping the peace?