

## **DEVOTIONAL • PALM SUNDAY**

### **READ 1 MARK 11:1-11.**

In reading the passage in preparation for this week, for the first time I thought of the irony of calling this the Triumphal Entry. Jesus enters Jerusalem and is seemingly accorded his due as David's heir and King of Israel. People's hopes are high. "Save!" they call. He is lauded. Palm branches are waved! Expectations are high. Jesus seems to accept this but does not seem swayed by it. Am I alone in the sense of dread this calls up?

The Prophet Zechariah has two mentions of the Messiah King. In Zechariah 9:9, he says,

*"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout Daughter of Jerusalem!  
See your King comes to you,  
Righteous and having salvation,  
Gentle and riding on a donkey  
On a colt, the foal of a donkey."*

In those days if a king came in peace, he would ride on a donkey, not a warhorse. And in this case, not even a full-grown donkey, but a colt. A King coming in peace—most powerful God entering his place in the utmost humility.

But what the crowd wants is the Messiah from Zechariah 14:3-4:

*"Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south."*

Expectations and reality are on a collision course. It is as extreme as the people wanting John Wick, or John Wayne, or Patton ... and getting someone whom they perceive as Mr. Rogers. He is NOT what they want, and within a few short days, some of these in this joyous exhilarated mob will be shaking not Palm branches but fists and shouting not "Save," but "CRUCIFY!"

Is this not the purpose of Lent? To walk with Jesus through these final days of his work on this earth? Can we, these many years later, be with him as the powers and principalities, human expectations, disappointments, and capriciousness gather like a perfect storm to do their worst? Can we bear the tension and anxiety, beginning with this "Triumphal Entry" now, to more fully experience the triumph and joy of Easter morning?

# DAY 2 • BIBLE STUDY

## **EXODUS 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14**

### **PREPARATION**

Come to your place where you find yourself comfortable in the presence of Jesus. Bring your Bible and your pens and pencils to this spot and greet him who is eager to meet with you. Ask him to open your eyes to his Word and thank him for his faithful presence.

### **OBSERVATION**

Read Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14. Verses 5-10 are optional, but there might be some interesting questions there. Read the passage a second time. Look for repeated words, or phrases that stand out, social mores you might not understand. Ask questions about the passage. Be curious. Why a lamb? What is the significance of the first born? What is the cause for haste? Who is God judging ultimately? You might want to go back to read Genesis 22:1-19 and Exodus 1. You might look at the Bible Project video *How God's Anger and Love Work Together*: [https://youtu.be/TeQ1nq\\_YJD0?si=dNef0MpO7SsirtRn](https://youtu.be/TeQ1nq_YJD0?si=dNef0MpO7SsirtRn). You might also benefit from reading the Shema Commentary on Exodus 12:1-14 (<https://shema.com/exodus-121-14-lessons-from-the-first-passover-part-1-14559/>).

### **INTERPRETATION**

What insights have you gained regarding Passover? How does this passage inform your understanding of Christ's sacrifice? What does this story reveal about God's justice and mercy?

### **APPLICATION**

Will you resolve to bring this new information to the Communion Table the next time you celebrate communion? This was an ordinance in effect until the time of Christ when he fulfilled this sacrifice that changed the world. What tradition can you and your family build around God's rescuing Israel from the tyrant of Egypt, and Christ's rescuing us from the tyranny of sin?

# **DAY 3 • IMAGINATIVE PRAYER**

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## **JOHN 12:1-11**

### **PREPARE**

Make your way to your comfortable place to meet Jesus. Relax your shoulders, take a deep breath and let it out in a sigh. Come into his presence as if sitting for a visit with an old friend. Ask him to meet with you and speak to you through this passage.

This Scripture describes a celebratory dinner to honor Jesus and commemorate the raising of Lazarus from death. They are probably holding this dinner at Simon the Leper's house where Martha, Lazarus' sister, is acting as hostess. During the course of the evening, Mary, Lazarus' other sister, offers Jesus an extravagant gift.

### **READ JOHN 12:1-11**

Imagine the unbridled joy at this dinner. Martha is loving on Jesus with food and service. Mary quietly unbinds her hair and wipes Jesus' feet. It is six days before Jesus' sacrifice, is he thinking about what is to come? Is he present because these are his friends? Smell the aroma of the perfume. Does her intimate act make you uncomfortable? Does it seem a bit much? Or are you touched by her gift, enjoying the perfumed air? Is it awkward when Judas breaks into the moment? What do you hear in Jesus' rebuke to Judas, in his defense of Mary? What do you think of the crowd that shows up to see Lazarus? Do you sense menace in the attitude of the chief priests on the fringes of the crowd? What comfort might you give Jesus? Stay with any part of this moment as long as you wish.

### **PRAY**

Finish your time in a conversation with Jesus about where you find yourself in his story. Offer him a prayer of thanks for insights that came up about him, and perhaps yourself.

# **DAY 4 • LECTIO DIVINA**

## **HEBREWS 10:16-25**

### **PREPARE**

Come to your place where you've become accustomed to meeting with Jesus. Take a few deep breaths to release any stress you've accumulated throughout the day. Relax your shoulders. Greet Jesus with a quiet joy and hope as you expect to hear from him.

### **READ (LECTIO)**

Read Hebrews 10:16-25 slowly and aloud. Listen and look for a word or phrase that stands out to you. Take your time and linger.

### **REFLECT (MEDITATIO)**

Read the passage again paying attention to that word or phrase. What is that word causing in you? Hope? A sense of relief? What is there for you?

### **RESPOND (ORATIO)**

Read the passage once more and speak with Jesus about the part that speaks to you. Would you like to praise him for something? Ask him to make something in the passage a felt reality for you? Listen for his response or sit quietly in companionable silence.

### **REST (CONTEMPLATIO)**

Read the passage a final time, taking that word or phrase to heart. Rest in the blessing of being alive during the time of this New Covenant.

### **RESOLVE (INCARNATIO)**

What response does this call up within you? The confidence to go before God's very throne? The peace of a clean heart and body? The invitation to encourage each other to good deeds? The joy of community? Respond to the call knowing he is enabling you to walk in these ways.



## DAY 5 • VISIO DIVINA



**“PASSOVER: BEFORE THE FOUNDATION” BY SKIP MCKINSTRY**

### **TURN TOWARD**

All of Lent is a time to turn toward the Cross of Christ, in a way taking our place in what Paul calls the “fellowship of his suffering.” Of course, we do not suggest that our giving up of chocolate, social media, or Netflix for Lent is in any way equivalent to the suffering Jesus endured on our behalf. Our acts are not sacrifices—they are reminders. They help point us toward the real suffering that takes place in all of our lives and how our suffering is somehow taken into Christ’s suffering and made new. Our Lenten offerings are tiny. His offering is cosmic in scale. At Passover, the Jewish people look backward to a miraculous encounter with God. Pondering the lamb’s blood on the doorposts, they see a sign of Yahweh’s deliverance, they remember, and they have hope. We ponder the same story in our Lenten practices and in the Eucharist (Communion) where—turning toward the bread and wine, his body and his blood—we remember the Lamb who was sacrificed before the foundation of the world ... and we have hope.

## **SURRENDER**

*This breath prayer is a good way to begin:*

*[On the inhale] Immanuel*  
*[On the exhale] God with me*  
*[On the inhale] Open my heart*  
*[On the exhale] That I may truly see.*

## **READ**

Read the following from Exodus 12:2-3; 6-7; 12-13.

*Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you.*

## **ENGAGE**

Consider those verses and this story as you take time to look at the artwork.

Imagine a clear Egyptian night, one in which you can see all the stars in the heavens, shining like the multitudes of Abraham's offspring. You are filled with nervous anticipation as this man Moses has told you to prepare your last meal in Egypt. Ordinarily you would not spend a lot of time with a lamb you were about to slaughter to feed your family. But Moses said to choose it and take care of it until the fourteenth of the month. That makes this process much more difficult. You've grown attached. Try as you might, you have never been able to get over the fact that sheep can be disarmingly endearing creatures. But Moses was insistent, so you sharpen your blade. As the life drains out of it, you brush some of the lamb's blood on the posts and lintel of your front door. Once you have roasted it, you and your family eat—in haste, with bitter herbs and unleavened bread, tunics tucked and sandals on—just as Moses directed.

You try to get a little sleep but the excitement of finally being delivered from Egypt keeps you up. What new adventures and struggles will the dawn bring with it? Suddenly, a chill courses through your body, and you sense a dark and ominous presence. The moment passes quickly. You and your family are safe, but your heart goes out to the

other households whose cries tell you their first-born sons were not protected. You comfort yourself with the knowledge that all of this was necessary to fulfill Yahweh's promise to your ancestor Abraham, that through Abraham's children, "all the nations of the earth will be blessed." You don't understand it, but like Abraham binding Isaac, you trust Yahweh, and you believe Yahweh can raise your neighbors from the dead.

**REMEMBER**

Carry the image and the questions it raises in your mind and heart throughout your week. Look at it frequently and ask the Lord to show you more. Recall the many other stories of the Old Testament that speak to us about Christ. Listen carefully to the One who is, who was, and who is to come. Grace and peace to you.



