Worship Resources for March 24th—Palm/Passion Sunday

*For Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Vigil Services, see my Special Resources page for Lent/Easter. Also check out the Journey through Holy Week resources, which is a special resource for children and youth.*

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16 or Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29; Luke 19:28-40 or Luke 22:14-23:56; Philippians 2:5-11

We have reached the end of the season of Lent. Our previous readings of Hebrew scripture have included passages reminding the people of God’s covenant, of God’s faithfulness. This passage in Isaiah is from a human being’s point of view, a human being who remains faithful to God despite others failings, because of God’s covenant. It is not an easy task. The speaker remains faithful to God’s covenant and will not act in violence nor retaliate. As the early Christians looked back on the last days of Jesus, they saw Jesus’ resolve in this passage. Jesus, who did not act with violence or react violently, was mocked and spit upon and then crucified. The resilience of the speaker in this passage of Isaiah to stay faithful to God’s ways and not follow in the way of violence of the world reminds us Christians today of the way of Jesus, and our own resolve to remain faithful.

Psalm 31:9-16 is a prayerful cry for help from God. The psalmist is facing adversity, enemies abound and illness or disease has also attacked the psalmist’s body. In all this distress, the psalmist trusts in God and still asks for God’s help, trusting that God will be faithful and will bring deliverance, healing, and hope.

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-20 celebrates God’s deliverance and proclaims God’s triumph. For those who remain faithful to God, they will celebrate and rejoice. The psalmist sings thanksgiving and praise to God in this time of wondrous joy. Though this psalm is quoted by Jesus later, in this time, it is referring to the people of Israel, who have been rejected by their neighbors—they are beloved by God. God looks upon the rejects, the marginalized, the oppressed—and lifts them up, delivers them, honors them. They are now the saved, the found, the free, and the celebrated.

Luke 19:28-40 contains the familiar story of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. Echoing the cries of the angels at Jesus’ birth, the disciples are now the ones who say, “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Luke’s version also contains the little story of the Pharisees telling Jesus to have his disciples stop (again, Luke does not paint all the Pharisees in a bad light—many of them through Luke’s Gospel try to warn Jesus that Herod wants him dead, and in this moment, they are probably trying to warn him against causing any trouble for the temple leaders). But Jesus tells them that the stones would shout out if the disciples were silent. Or worse: perhaps it would be the multitude of the heavenly host once again!

Luke 22-23 is the story of the Passion, from the Lord’s Supper until Jesus’ death. Whether to focus only on the Palms, the procession into Jerusalem, or to focus on the Passion, the death of Jesus, is the tricky question for the preacher—you cannot have one without the other. Both parts are integral to the story of Jesus and Holy Week. Each Gospel is different and Luke’s Gospel contains some interesting, unique elements. Jesus tells the disciples now to take up swords (though clearly only to fulfill the scripture about being counted among the lawless) but when they show him they have two, he says, “It is enough.” Jesus’ prayer on the Mount of Olives contains an interesting, though uncertain, verse about Jesus’ sweat becoming like blood. Jesus heals the slave of the high priest after his ear is cut off. And perhaps most remembered, the two others crucified with Jesus have words attributed to them and at least one of them is repentant and believes.

Luke’s version is very interesting, but I think it once again cannot be told without the context of the Palms, the entry into Jerusalem, in which once again peace is proclaimed—though at Jesus’ birth, it is “Peace on Earth,” and near his death it is “Peace in heaven.” Even with the order to carry a sword, Jesus still heals the slave, refers to those who come after him with weapons as bandits, and says, “No more of this!” Which part of the story strikes you? Which part that Luke tells differently is opening up in you?

Lent is nearing its end. The journey to Jerusalem, to the cross, is almost complete. Jesus has called us to take up our cross. What still needs to be put to death in us that is separating us from God? Is it greed or pride? Is it the focus on our own survival? Is it our own need to be accepted? Is it our need for control? The disciples certainly didn’t expect things to turn out the way they did. When they came into Jerusalem shouting “Hosanna” and “Peace in Heaven,” they were not expecting their Messiah to go to the cross, even though he had told them more than once what would happen. What is it that gets in the way for you, that needs to die in order for you to live in Christ?

Call to Worship

With palms we call out to praise You, O God!

 **Hosanna, Save us, Emmanuel, God with us!**

With clenched fists we strike against You, O God!

 **Hosanna, Save us, Emmanuel, God with us!**

With angry voices we shout against You, O God!

 **Hosanna, Save us, Emmanuel, God with us!**

With bitter tears we cry out for You, O God!

 **Hosanna, Save us, Emmanuel, God with us!**

With nothing but our human selves, we come to worship You, O God!

 **Forgive us, Save us, Heal us, and Redeem us! Amen and Amen!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Wholeness, we confess that we have been broken by the world. We have been betrayed by friends, and at times we are the ones who have betrayed others. We have been rejected, and at times we have rejected others. Forgive us our sins. Help us to put to death all that needs to die in our lives—all the things that keep us separated from You, our own selfishness, pride, and greed. Guide us in Your way, which is the way of the Cross, to deny the things of the world that have power over us. Help us to live into Your ways of love. In the name of Jesus, who loves us so much he gave himself up, denying the world’s power over others, to the point of dying on the cross—it is in Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

We know that the way of love is hard, but it leads to life. We know that we must pass through death, but when we die to the ways of the world, we know that in Christ we live. Know that you are forgiven when you seek forgiveness, and you are loved when you love, for you do not live in the ways of this world. This is the way of Christ. Amen.

Prayer

Beloved Jesus, we long to walk in Your ways but we allow the way of the world to cloud our judgment. We desire to have the veil lifted, the walls broken down, but we are afraid. We cling to the ways of this world, seeking our own survival, our own gain, trying to live a good life. Help us to let go of false assumptions and worldly advice. Call us back to Your commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. Guide us in this life to live for You, and not for ourselves, for in losing our lives, we find them in You. We pray this in Your name, our Savior, Redeemer and Friend. Amen.