Worship Resources for April 14, 2019—Palm and Passion Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary

Liturgy of the Palms: Psalm 118:1-2; 19-29; Luke 19:28-40

Liturgy of the Passion: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 22:14-23:56 or 23:1-49

Narrative Lectionary: Triumphal Entry, Matthew 21:1-17 (Psalm 118:25-29)

We begin with the Liturgy of the Palms on this Palm and Passion Sunday, with passages from Psalm 118, a call to worship in the temple. The psalmist calls upon the people to praise God as they enter the gates of the temple. The people, rejected by the world, have become the chief cornerstone, the foundation of God’s work on earth, so that all peoples might know the creator God. The psalmist leads the community in worship as they approach the altar, calling upon God to save them, and giving thanks for God’s steadfast love.

In Luke’s account of Jesus entering Jerusalem, in a similar manner to Mark and Matthew, Jesus tells the disciples to go ahead of him into Jerusalem, to find a colt and let the owner know when he asks that “the Lord needs it.” Jesus enters Jerusalem, with the crowds spreading their cloaks on the road in front of him, shouting “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” However, they also repeat a similar refrain from the angels at Jesus’ birth: “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” When Jesus is told by some of the religious leaders to tell his disciples to stop, he says that if they were to be silent, the stones would shout.

The Liturgy of the Passion begins with a passage from the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. The Suffering Servant at times is the people of Israel, but in this passage, the prophet himself is identifying with the image. He was given the gift of teaching, the ear to hear God, but has suffered for it. God has helped him, and God has vindicated him, for now he is with the people, returning home from exile. If God is with him, who can stand against him?

The psalmist pleads with God for deliverance from their enemies in Psalm 31:9-16. The suffering they have endured, mentally and physically, has weighed on them. They fear for their own life, yet they will trust in God. They pray for God’s deliverance from their enemies and persecutors, and to be saved in God’s steadfast love.

Paul either composed, or recites, the ancient confession of the church in Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus didn’t exploit his equality with God but became humble to the point of dying on the cross. God raised Christ and exalted him, so that every name will bow at the name of Jesus, and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Christ, fully divine, became fully human, one of us, even dying as one of us, so that all might live.

The selections for the Passion narrative from Luke, either the longer version or the shorter version, contain the events of Jesus’ last night up until his death. The longer version contains the Last Supper, the argument among the disciples of who was the greatest, and Jesus’ time in prayer at the Mount of Olives. In Luke’s account, the disciples bring supplies, including swords, to fulfill a scripture that Jesus was accounted among the lawless; yet, when one of the disciples cuts off the ear of the slave of the high priest, Jesus declares “no more of this!” and heals him. It’s clear that Jesus was not advocating violence, but rather showing his fate among the criminals of his day. Also, in Luke’s account, when he prays at the Mount of Olives, an angel appears, and Jesus’ own sweat appears to turn into blood as it drops on the ground. Much of the other details are similar to the other Gospel accounts.

Beginning in the shorter scripture selection, Jesus is before Pilate, then he goes before Herod, then is sent back to Pilate. Luke’s account declares that Pilate, the Roman governor, and Herod, the king of the Jewish people in Jerusalem but appointed by Rome, became friends that day. Having a common source of frustration in Jesus’ refusal to answer their questions, they become united. When Jesus is crucified along with two others, one mocks Jesus, but the other declares Jesus is innocent, and asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. In Luke’s account, Jesus is the innocent victim, who dies on a Roman cross, whose violent death ends violence.

The Narrative Lectionary follows Matthew’s account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. The writer of Matthew’s gospel account liked to quote Hebrew scripture and show how Jesus fulfilled it, but he often misunderstood the translation. Matthew’s account is the only one in which Jesus is given both a donkey and its colt to ride. As he enters Jerusalem, the people have spread their cloaks as well as cut branches on the road, and they shout, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” From the streets, Jesus enters the temple, drives out the ones selling and buying, overturning the tables of the moneychangers. Jesus quotes scripture twice to justify his actions and the actions of the crowds among him.

Psalm 118:25-29 is the portion of the psalm in which the psalmist calls upon God to save them, then calls upon the people to bless God’s name. As part of a processional entering the temple, the psalmist calls upon the people to approach the altar and give thanks to God, whose steadfast love endures forever.

From the point of view of the disciples, the events of Holy Week go from joy to terror, from celebration to nightmare. They enter with Jesus, and though they may have been afraid, their fear and trembling in the beginning was in response to awe, and they were full of hope. By the end of the week, their friend has been killed, hung on a cross, and they have scattered, fearing for their own life. We can understand the emotions of this heavy week, even thousands of years later, going from life to death, and then ultimately to life again. But for a short while, we must sit with the fear and terror of death, the pain of hate, the suffering of the world that Jesus faced. To skip over the nightmare the disciples and Jesus himself experienced would be to skip over the work of Christ on the cross, where death is defeated, where sin does not have the final word.

Call to Worship

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

**Hosanna! Save us, O God!**

Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!

 **Hosanna! Save us, O God!**

Blessed is the coming reign of our God!

 **Hosanna! Save us, O God!**

As we enter this holy week, we come in joy and trembling;

 **Hosanna! Save us, O God!**

Prayer of Confession

O Come Thou Wisdom From On High, and order all things far and nigh; to us the path of knowledge show, and cause us in her ways to go. O God of Wisdom, we confess that like the disciples we act out in fear rather than courage. We hide instead of facing the challenges before us. We deny instead of accepting responsibility for our actions. We curse instead of bless. We hate instead of love. We try to live with ourselves and our ways instead of dying to the ways of the world. Forgive us for our foolish ways. Lead us into the ways of wisdom, Your ways of justice and mercy. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

We shout Hosanna, asking for God to save us, and God already has. We are saved from hate by God’s love that grows in us. We are saved from sin by the wisdom and knowledge of God’s forgiveness and mercy. We are saved from the ways of the world by living into God’s ways of justice and mercy that lead to peace. We are saved by the love of God in Christ Jesus, who laid down his life for us. We are saved from violence by his act of non-violence. We are saved by Christ’s love, which surpasses death, and leads us to eternal life. You are saved. You are loved. You are forgiven. You are restored. Amen.

Prayer

Almighty God, Maker of us all, You made us mortal beings. You made us capable of both love and hate. You made us capable of violence and peace. You made us to die, but You created us to live. Call us away from the fear of death, to the knowledge that hate will not have the final word, the hope that violence will cease, and the promise that peace will prevail. For You are the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sustainer, and in You we have the promise of eternal life, and the hope of resurrection. Amen.