

## Study Guide for March 25, 2018

**Theme:** Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday

**Readings:** Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Mark 11:1-11

**Alt. readings:** Isaiah 50:4-9; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Mark 14:1-15:47

This is it! Holy Week begins today with Jesus riding into Jerusalem to the cries of the people shouting loud hosannas to their new king. This joy and excitement will only last a few days. They have no idea what Jesus knows; that there is a cross with his name on it waiting to initiate God's plan. Little do they know that their cries for salvation will soon turn to cries of pain and sorrow as Jesus begins his journey from the innocent colt to the gruesome cross. Today, I wonder if the cross has become so ordinary that we hardly see it?

Jill Carattini argues, "There is nothing ordinary about the manner in which this king died, the cross on which he hung, or the symbol of death on which he inscribed a hope that would be carried throughout the nations. There was an ordinary cross in history with his name on it, and he went to it with nothing short of the world in mind."

Lent is our journey that allows us to walk through the pain and suffering of the cross on route to Easter's redemptive joy. I have included the extra lectionary readings so you can experience the entire passion story. But my message will focus on those two planks of wood that held up our Savior, naked and exposed, for the world to both mock and mourn.

**READ: Mark 11:1-11; Zechariah 9:9-10 (Mark 8:31-21, 9:30-32, 10:32-34)**

Jesus has tried to tell his disciples that his destiny is to suffer grievously – to be rejected. They don't understand, and this grand parade doesn't make it clearer. The prophets and the psalmists have written about this day, yet like Jesus' their words have fallen on deaf ears. Within a week's time this acclaim will turn to humiliation; the honored Jesus will be the humiliated Jesus! The Christian church often professes that God understands our pain because God has experienced it through Jesus Christ. No wonder we sing, "Hallelujah!"

**Q:** Some of you suffer from pain – mental, physical, or spiritual – in ways only you understand. How is God present in your suffering?  
- Write them down and offer God a prayer of thanks for being there with you.

**READ: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29**

This is a psalm that is clearly about God, and is often the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. It begins and ends with a celebration of deliverance; the central saving acts of God in the scriptures. This is a hymn of thanksgiving that should be sung from a heart that has been blessed and delivered by God.

**Q:** As you read through this passage carefully, what phrases seem familiar to you and which ones speak to God's deliverance in your life?  
- Write down the ways God has been there for you this past week, and then offer up your own prayer of thanksgiving by naming each one out loud to God.

**Read: Isaiah 50:4-9a**

Isaiah reminds us of God's help in times of distress. This passage was likely written during the time of Babylonian exile in the 6th Century BC—a time of great suffering for the Israelites. Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion would have been similarly devastating for the disciples as they faced the death of their teacher and the fear and uncertainty of what the future might hold. But even in times of persecution and doubt, God is our help.

**Q:** Isaiah writes, "The Lord has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word." How have you been comforted by the words of others? How has God helped you to speak words of comfort to those in need?

Write down those names and offer a prayer to God for each person on that list.

**Philippians 2:5-11**

Paul reminds us that Jesus chose to journey alongside humanity. As part of that journey, he endured the worst of human suffering, even to the point of death. Take a moment to imagine what it was like for Jesus and the disciples in his final days. Paul implores us to take on the "same mind" as Christ. We are asked to embrace humanity in its fullness and to appreciate the paradoxical proximity of humanity to God: the more we empty and humble ourselves, the closer we draw to experiencing the glory of God.

**Q:** As you think of Jesus' final days what events capture your heart and imagination that help you relate to Jesus' humanity?  
- Write down the names of people you might know who are going through those very same experiences, and ask God to rescue them from their distress.

**Read: Mark 14:1 -15:47**

The finale of Mark's passion narrative is a tale of sorrow, but it teaches us what love looks like through God's eyes. But there is also much sorrow to be found. God's own people turn quickly, shouting "Crucify him!" They mock him as his body is literally torn apart on the cross. And the only one who sees Jesus for who he really is, is the centurion who was ordered to guard him. Most notably are the women who have followed and provided for Jesus throughout his ministry. They watch his crucifixion from a distance while the male disciples seem to be absent.

**Q:** Imagine yourself as a character in this story. Who do you most identify with?  
-Write down their name and thank God for all those who have led you to have a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.

**Slow Read: Psalm 31:9-16.** Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read these words and give your pain and any distress over to God.

**Prayer:** Dear God, it is hard for me to imagine what it is like to see your child in such agonizing pain; I am blessed to know that you do not give up on any of us, but instead have chosen to love us, walk with us, and to carry us through this life to your eternal heaven. Amen.