



# SUNDAY OF THE PASSION

PALM SUNDAY

## Procession with Palms

### PROCESSIONAL GOSPEL: Matthew 21:1-11

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

<sup>1</sup>When they had come near Jerusalem  
and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives,  
Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them,  
“Go into the village ahead of you,  
and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her;  
untie them and bring them to me.

<sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, just say this,  
“The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.”

<sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet:

<sup>5</sup>“Tell the daughter of Zion,  
Look, your king is coming to you,  
humble and mounted on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

<sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them;

<sup>7</sup>they brought the donkey and the colt  
and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.

<sup>8</sup>A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road,  
and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

<sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>10</sup>When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking,

“Who is this?”

<sup>11</sup>The crowds were saying,

“This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

The gospel of the Lord.

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#### PROCESSIONAL GOSPEL *Bethphage = BETH-fuh-juh*

The richest reading of this little story will vocally distinguish between the voices of Jesus, the prophet, and the crowds. Those subtle distinctions require forethought and adequate rehearsal time. Invest in both. Let this account of our Lord’s grand entrance be a festive prelude to the later reading of the passion.

## FIRST READING: Isaiah 50:4-9a

A reading from Isaiah.

<sup>4</sup>The Lord GOD has given me  
a trained tongue,  
that I may know how to sustain  
the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens,  
wakens my ear  
to listen as those who are taught.

<sup>5</sup>The Lord GOD has opened my ear,  
and I was not rebellious;  
I did not turn backward.

<sup>6</sup>I gave my back to those who struck me  
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;  
I did not hide my face  
from insult and spitting.

<sup>7</sup>The Lord GOD helps me;  
therefore I have not been disgraced;  
therefore I have set my face like flint,  
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

<sup>8</sup>he who vindicates me is near.  
Who will contend with me?  
Let us stand in court together.

Who are my adversaries?  
Let them confront me.

<sup>9a</sup>It is the Lord GOD who helps me;  
who will declare me guilty?

Word of God, word of life.      *or*      The word of the Lord.

## PSALMODY: Psalm 31:9-16

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### FIRST READING    *Isaiah = eye-ZAY-uh*

One might be helped to think about this reading as a poem. Be sensitive to the images painted in these verses and help the hearer to see them. The congregation is intended to hear in these words the voice of Jesus as he sets his face toward Jerusalem and his impending passion. Verse 8 is of particular interest and provides a particular challenge. The speaker asks a question in two different ways. They are rhetorical questions, though, so don't raise your pitch at the end of them. Be certain to provide adequate pauses between each question and its reply and between the two questions so that the hearer can follow the dialogue.

## SECOND READING: Philippians 2:5-11

A reading from Philippians.

<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
<sup>6</sup>who, though he existed in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
assuming human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a human,  
<sup>8</sup>he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death—  
even death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup>Therefore God exalted him even more highly  
and gave him the name  
that is above every other name,  
<sup>10</sup>so that at the name given to Jesus  
every knee should bend,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup>and every tongue should confess  
that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Word of God, word of life.      *or*      The word of the Lord.

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### SECOND READING      *Philippians = fih-LIP-ee-unz*

This text is widely known, but the NRSVue translation differs substantially from the NRSV. Those differences can easily trip up the reader who is not carefully prepared. Live with the text a little this week and allow it to address you. The author attempts to describe the mind of Christ in verses 6 and 7. He describes the Father's rewarding of the Son in verses 9-11. But the topic sentence is verse 5, where he urges both the reader and the hearer to "let the same mind be in you." Bring appropriate urgency to this holy instruction.

**GOSPEL: Matthew 26:14—27:66**  
**OR Matthew 27:11-54, following on p. 111**

The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

<sup>14</sup>One of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot,  
went to the chief priests <sup>15</sup>and said,  
“What will you give me if I betray him to you?”  
They paid him thirty pieces of silver.

<sup>16</sup>And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

<sup>17</sup>On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying,  
“Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

<sup>18</sup>He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him,  
‘The Teacher says, My time is near;  
I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’”

<sup>19</sup>So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them,  
and they prepared the Passover meal.

<sup>20</sup>When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve disciples,

<sup>21</sup>and while they were eating he said,  
“Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.”

<sup>22</sup>And they became greatly distressed  
and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?”

<sup>23</sup>He answered,  
“The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.

<sup>24</sup>The Son of Man goes as it is written of him,  
but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!  
It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”

<sup>25</sup>Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?”  
He replied, “You have said so.”

<sup>26</sup>While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread,  
and after blessing it he broke it,  
gave it to the disciples, and said,  
“Take, eat; this is my body.”

<sup>27</sup>Then he took a cup,  
and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying,  
“Drink from it, all of you,

<sup>28</sup>for this is my blood of the covenant,  
which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ▶

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**GOSPEL** *Iscariot = is-CAR-ee-ut Gethsemane = geth-SEM-uh-nee Zebedee = ZEB-uh-dee*  
*Caiaphas = KAY-uh-fus prophesy = PROF-uh-sigh Jeremiah = jehr-uh-MY-uh*  
*Barabbas = buh-RAB-us Cyrene = sy-REE-neh Eli, lema sabachthani = EL-ee LEM-uh*  
*suh-BAHK-thun-ee Arimathea = ar-ih-muh-THEE-uh*

Sadly, a significant segment of the assembly will be exposed to the passion account only once this year. More than a few will not be in worship on Good Friday. That may be the best argument for reading Matthew's telling in its entirety. If this one reading is to be the best it can be, the reader will want to be devotionally steeped in the story and have read it aloud any number of times in advance.

<sup>29</sup>I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

<sup>30</sup>When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

<sup>31</sup>Then Jesus said to them,

"You will all fall away because of me this night, for it is written,  
'I will strike the shepherd,  
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

<sup>32</sup>"But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

<sup>33</sup>Peter said to him,

"Even if all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."

<sup>34</sup>Jesus said to him,

"Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."

<sup>35</sup>Peter said to him,

"Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you."  
And so said all the disciples.

<sup>36</sup>Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples,

"Sit here while I go over there and pray."

<sup>37</sup>He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be grieved and agitated.

<sup>38</sup>Then he said to them,

"My soul is deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me."

<sup>39</sup>And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want."

<sup>40</sup>Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter,

"So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?

<sup>41</sup>Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

<sup>42</sup>Again he went away for the second time and prayed,

"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."

<sup>43</sup>Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.

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Practice (especially aloud) makes the difference between passable and persuasive, even "passion"-ate. Consider the merit of a substantial pause (and even bowing deeply at the reading desk) following 27:50 when Jesus "breathed his last."

<sup>44</sup>So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.

<sup>45</sup>Then he came to the disciples and said to them,  
“Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?  
Now the hour is at hand,  
and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

<sup>46</sup>Get up, let us be going. Look, my betrayer is at hand.”

<sup>47</sup>While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

<sup>48</sup>Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying,  
“The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.”

<sup>49</sup>At once he came up to Jesus and said,  
“Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him.

<sup>50</sup>Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.”  
Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.

<sup>51</sup>Suddenly one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

<sup>52</sup>Then Jesus said to him,

“Put your sword back into its place,  
for all who take the sword will die by the sword.

<sup>53</sup>Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father,  
and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

<sup>54</sup>But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled,  
which say it must happen in this way?”

<sup>55</sup>At that hour Jesus said to the crowds,

“Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me  
as though I were a rebel?

Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me.

<sup>56</sup>But all this has taken place,  
so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled.”  
Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

<sup>57</sup>Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest,  
where the scribes and the elders had gathered.

<sup>58</sup>But Peter was following him at a distance,  
as far as the courtyard of the high priest,  
and going inside he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end. ▶

<sup>59</sup>Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death,  
<sup>60</sup>but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward <sup>61</sup>and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’”  
<sup>62</sup>The high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?”  
<sup>63</sup>But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, “I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”  
<sup>64</sup>Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”  
<sup>65</sup>Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. <sup>66</sup>What do you think?” They answered, “He deserves death.”  
<sup>67</sup>Then they spat in his face and struck him, and some slapped him, <sup>68</sup>saying, “Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who is it that struck you?”

<sup>69</sup>Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A female servant came to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.”  
<sup>70</sup>But he denied it before all of them, saying, “I do not know what you are talking about.”  
<sup>71</sup>When he went out to the porch, another female servant saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus the Nazarene.”  
<sup>72</sup>Again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.”  
<sup>73</sup>After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.”  
<sup>74</sup>Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know the man!”  
At that moment the cock crowed.  
<sup>75</sup>Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”  
And he went out and wept bitterly.

<sup>27:1</sup>When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death.

<sup>2</sup>They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

<sup>3</sup>When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders.

<sup>4</sup>He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood."

But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself."

<sup>5</sup>Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

<sup>6</sup>But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said,

"It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money."

<sup>7</sup>After conferring together,

they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners.

<sup>8</sup>For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

<sup>9</sup>Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah,

"And they took the thirty pieces of silver,

the price of the one on whom a price had been set,

on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price,

<sup>10</sup>and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."

<sup>11</sup>Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him,

"Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus said, "You say so."

<sup>12</sup>But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer.

<sup>13</sup>Then Pilate said to him,

"Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?"

<sup>14</sup>But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge,

so that the governor was greatly amazed.

<sup>15</sup>Now at the festival

the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted.

<sup>16</sup>At that time they had a notorious prisoner called Jesus Barabbas.

<sup>17</sup>So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them,

"Whom do you want me to release for you,

Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"

<sup>18</sup>For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. ▶

<sup>19</sup>While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him,  
“Have nothing to do with that innocent man,  
for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him.”

<sup>20</sup>Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds  
to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.

<sup>21</sup>The governor again said to them,  
“Which of the two do you want me to release for you?”  
And they said, “Barabbas.”

<sup>22</sup>Pilate said to them,  
“Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”  
All of them said, “Let him be crucified!”

<sup>23</sup>Then he asked, “Why, what evil has he done?”  
But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!”

<sup>24</sup>So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing  
but rather that a riot was beginning,  
he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying,  
“I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.”

<sup>25</sup>Then the people as a whole answered,  
“His blood be on us and on our children!”

<sup>26</sup>So he released Barabbas for them,  
and after flogging Jesus he handed him over to be crucified.

<sup>27</sup>Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor’s  
headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him.

<sup>28</sup>They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,

<sup>29</sup>and after twisting some thorns into a crown they put it on his head.

They put a reed in his right hand  
and knelt before him and mocked him, saying,  
“Hail, King of the Jews!”

<sup>30</sup>They spat on him and took the reed and struck him on the head.

<sup>31</sup>After mocking him,  
they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him.  
Then they led him away to crucify him.

<sup>32</sup>As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross.

<sup>33</sup>And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull),

<sup>34</sup>they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.

<sup>35</sup>And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots;

<sup>36</sup>then they sat down there and kept watch over him.

<sup>37</sup>Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

<sup>38</sup>Then two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

<sup>39</sup>Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads <sup>40</sup>and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

<sup>41</sup>In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying,

<sup>42</sup>"He saved others; he cannot save himself.

He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him.

<sup>43</sup>He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to, for he said, 'I am God's Son.'"

<sup>44</sup>The rebels who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

<sup>45</sup>From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon.

<sup>46</sup>And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice,

"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is,

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

<sup>47</sup>When some of the bystanders heard it, they said,

"This man is calling for Elijah."

<sup>48</sup>At once one of them ran and got a sponge,

filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick,

and gave it to him to drink.

<sup>49</sup>But the others said,

"Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him."

<sup>50</sup>Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. ►

<sup>51</sup>At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two,  
from top to bottom.

The earth shook, and the rocks were split.

<sup>52</sup>The tombs also were opened,  
and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

<sup>53</sup>After his resurrection they came out of the tombs  
and entered the holy city and appeared to many.

<sup>54</sup>Now when the centurion and those with him,  
who were keeping watch over Jesus,  
saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said,  
“Truly this man was God’s Son!”

<sup>55</sup>Many women were also there, looking on from a distance;  
they had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him.

<sup>56</sup>Among them were Mary Magdalene,  
and Mary the mother of James and Joseph,  
and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

<sup>57</sup>When it was evening,  
there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph,  
who also was himself a disciple of Jesus.

<sup>58</sup>He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus;  
then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.

<sup>59</sup>So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth

<sup>60</sup>and laid it in his new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock.

He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away.

<sup>61</sup>Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

<sup>62</sup>The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation,  
the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate <sup>63</sup>and said,  
“Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive,  
‘After three days I will rise again.’

<sup>64</sup>Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day;  
otherwise, his disciples may go and steal him away  
and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’  
and the last deception would be worse than the first.”

<sup>65</sup>Pilate said to them,

“You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.”

<sup>66</sup>So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

The gospel of the Lord.

**OR: Matthew 27:11-54**

The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

<sup>11</sup>Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him,  
“Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus said, “You say so.”

<sup>12</sup>But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer.

<sup>13</sup>Then Pilate said to him,

“Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?”

<sup>14</sup>But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge,  
so that the governor was greatly amazed.

<sup>15</sup>Now at the festival

the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd,  
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<sup>16</sup>At that time they had a notorious prisoner called Jesus Barabbas.

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“Whom do you want me to release for you,  
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<sup>18</sup>For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over.

<sup>19</sup>While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him,

“Have nothing to do with that innocent man,  
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to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.

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“Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”

All of them said, “Let him be crucified!”

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he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying,

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They put a reed in his right hand  
and knelt before him and mocked him, saying,

“Hail, King of the Jews!”

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<sup>32</sup>As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon;  
they compelled this man to carry his cross.

<sup>33</sup>And when they came to a place called Golgotha  
(which means Place of a Skull),

<sup>34</sup>they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall,  
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they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots;

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“This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.”

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“You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself!  
If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

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were mocking him, saying,

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and we will believe in him.

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<sup>50</sup>Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

<sup>51</sup>At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two,  
from top to bottom.  
The earth shook, and the rocks were split.  
<sup>52</sup>The tombs also were opened,  
and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.  
<sup>53</sup>After his resurrection they came out of the tombs  
and entered the holy city and appeared to many.  
<sup>54</sup>Now when the centurion and those with him,  
who were keeping watch over Jesus,  
saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said,  
"Truly this man was God's Son!"

The gospel of the Lord.