Palm Sunday March 24, 2024

**Bible Verses:** Luke 19:28-40

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 454 to 459

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Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **Reflecting on the type of leader Jesus came to be.**

The thought of Jesus riding triumphantly into a city seems to be at odds with what we know about the humility that he usually carried himself with – but delving into some of the details of this entry make clear that Jesus was displaying himself as a different type of leader/king. In part of an extended prophecy on the coming future ruler of God’s people, the prophet Zechariah wrote “Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey; on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). Jesus undercutting the way kings typically rode into cities on war-horses – and also embracing the prophecy of being this ruler sent by God – would have been a dramatic statement against the power of Rome, as well as a continued expansion of the “last being first and the first being last” theme that characterizes much of Jesus’ preaching and teaching in Luke and the other Gospels.

* **Reflecting on why people were so excited, but then changed their mind.**

It is a confusing thing for both kids and adults that the people of Jerusalem seem to turn on Jesus so quickly, but there are a few factors that likely led to the sudden change in perception. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s gospels, the first thing that Jesus does upon entering into Jerusalem is to head to the Temple and throw out the money changers and overturn the tables of all those buying and selling there. This significantly escalates the feud with the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, and it also likely led to Jesus being known as a troublemaker. Several of Jesus’ teachings and parables upon entering Jerusalem are particularly pointed as well (see Luke 20 and 21) and these may ultimately have crystalized the plan among religious leaders that led to his eventual death. Palm Sunday is a triumphant day but it is also marked by danger – and so we hold both those things in tension as we head into Jesus’ final earthly week.

* **Reflecting on the wider events of Holy Week and what they mean.**

Although we covered Maundy Thursday last week, it may be worth retracing our steps a little bit with older students to cover the breadth of what happened during Jesus’ time in Jerusalem. From the triumphal entry of Palm Sunday, the bittersweet final night of Maundy Thursday, the devastation of Good Friday (FYI, scholars believe “good” and “holy” were once synonymous, which may be why “Good Friday” stuck), the grief of Holy Saturday, to the shocked jubilation of Easter – there is certainly a great deal for kids to be aware of!

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids – welcoming any newcomers warmly.**
	+ Younger kids: Are you off of school now? What are your plans?
	+ Older kids: Highs and Lows from the past week
* **We are learning about Jesus entering Jerusalem today – what is your favorite part of how we celebrate Palm Sunday at church?**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is the start of what we know as “Holy Week”, which is the most important week in our entire church calendar.
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
	+ Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
	+ Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage** (see next page for PreK/K questions)

* Some people have talked about how strange it was that Jesus chose to ride in on a donkey rather than a war horse like most kings would. What was Jesus telling people about the type of king/leader that he would be?
* The people who had lined the streets were shouting “Hosanna”, which is a word that meant “save us”. Why do you think people were shouting that at Jesus? How did Jesus’ ministry help change the world?

**Connections to Our Lives**

* People were excited that Jesus had come to be their king and leader – who do you think is a good leader? What makes them such a good leader?
* The cheers of Palm Sunday quickly turned into the jeers of Good Friday and Jesus’ death on the cross. Why do you think people changed their minds so quickly about Jesus? Do we turn on people that quickly too?

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* Does your family have any special Holy Week traditions for Palm Sunday, Good Friday, or Easter? Why do you think this is such an important week both for the church, and for individual Christians?

**Alternate Preschool and K/1st Questions**

Younger ages, particularly those in our preschool class, may have a hard time discussing the biblical text for very long (if at all). My hope is that these questions (and especially the activity) can help with engagement!

**Opening Questions / Activity**

* **Take some time to welcome / get to know the kids!**
	+ Today we are learning about Jesus entering into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as people cheered – it was sort of like a parade! Have you ever been to a parade before? What happened at the parade?
	+ People were waving palm branches in the air, shouting “Hosanna” and “praise God!”. How do you show/tell people that you’re excited? What are things that you do or say?

**Warm Up Game – Pictionary**

* All of the events of Palm Sunday definitely lend themselves well to drawing, so feel free to play several rounds of Pictionary with the kids
* Explain that you’ll start drawing and kids need to shout out guesses of things based on the Bible story from today:
	+ Palm Branch
	+ Donkey
	+ Jesus
	+ Jerusalem (or a city)
	+ Crowd / People Cheering
* Play as long as kids are having fun, then transition to the Bible questions.

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
	+ Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
	+ Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!
* People were excited that Jesus had come to be their king and leader – who do you think is a good leader? What makes them such a good leader?
* Jesus riding on a donkey was a sign that he was setting a different example from other leaders – that he was humble, peaceful, and kind. How can we be humble, peaceful, and kind to everyone in our lives?

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**Larry Kwak**

Palm Sunday is when we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem for the final week of his ministry – a time in which would change everything! What Jesus did that week is without parallel, but Larry Kwak, our example of faith today, has devoted his life to saving others’ lives through his extensive cancer research.

Kwak was born in New York in 1959, but his family moved to Lawrence, Kansas early in his childhood. A child of Korean immigrants, Kwak has shared in interviews that his family wasn’t overly religious but that they would still go to church a few times a year around Christmas and Easter.

During his freshman year of college at Northwestern, though, a friend of his shared a bit more about his Christian faith with Kwak – and Kwak has noted it was a turning point in his relationship with his faith. He continued to pursue a career in medicine and over the next 8 years he received both a medical degree and Ph.D from Northwestern in the field of tumor cell biology.

After graduation, Kwak would go on to serve at two of the pre-eminent cancer research institutions in the country: the National Cancer Institute and the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. Kwak saw this research as an opportunity to serve others and live out his faith, once reflecting: “We all have a universal calling to serve others, and I feel enormously privileged that my specific God-given calling in life is also my occupation.”

Kwak’s research eventually led to successful trials of cancer immunotherapy and a cancer vaccine for B-cell malignancies – and in 2010 he was unexpectedly named to Time Magazine’s 100 most influential people in the world. His research continues today, and as he shared in an interview: “My faith in God enables me to stay focused on making urgent, innovative discoveries that will impact patients. I always hope, because good outweighs the bad in the world;

our God-given hope cannot be taken away.”

Crafts / Activities

**Palm Sunday Color-Your-Own Palm**

**(Ages 3+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Crayons/Markers/Colored Pencils
* Scissors and Tape

Instructions:

* It’s not Palm Sunday without palms to wave! You can print, color, and assemble this version - or you can use the green version on the website.

**Palm Sunday Maze**

**(Ages 5+, 3 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Marker

Instructions:

* This maze is good for most ages – just hard enough to be interesting, but not so hard as to be frustrating!

**Palm Sunday Sudoku**

**(Ages 7+, 5-10 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Crayons/Markers/Colored Pencils

Instructions:

* Kids wanting a bit more of a challenge are welcome to try out this Holy Week sudoku – you need to fit one of every item in all six boxes, but there can’t be a duplicate item in either a column or a row! This will probably only work for kids who have played sudoku before, but it’s fun!

Biblical Background – Palm Sunday[[1]](#footnote-2)

As noted on the first page, the spiritual origin of Palm Sunday seems to be Zechariah 9:9 - “Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey; on a colt, the foal of a donkey”. *(Funny side note: the repetition of ideas using different terminology is extremely common in Hebrew poetry, such as “donkey… colt”, but Matthew interprets Zechariah literally and has Jesus enter Jerusalem with both a donkey and a colt. It is the only Gospel to do so.)*

Zechariah prophesied in the decades after the Babylonian Exile concluded in 539 BCE and he wrote during one of the most hopeful periods in Israel’s history. After spending a generation in exile, the people were given another chance to restart and rebuild their former home!

The entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, then, is a fulfillment of this prophecy – but the use of palms on this Sunday draws in a few other biblical events as well. While the Gospel of John is the only gospel to specify “branches of palm” (Matthew and Mark refer to branches, while the Gospel of Luke doesn’t even say anything about branches – only people laying their cloaks on the road!), the use of palm branches has been synonymous with this Sunday for centuries. Ultimately, the scene mirrors the reception given to the King of Judah in the post-united monarchy time (see 2 Kings 9:13) – again calling attention to this idea of Jesus as king, while also invoking a better era of Israel’s history.

However, the peoples’ particular use of palm branches to line the streets almost certainly comes from the Jewish festival of Sukkot (or, Festival of the Booths) – a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem in which temporary dwellings are built as a reminder of the wandering in the wilderness, during which there is a waving of four specific types of plants (one of which is a palm frond) in the street. In addition, the words that the people shout – “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” – come from Psalm 118, which also was used during the Festival of the Booths. This festival remembered the Exodus journey, and also traditionally marked the end of the harvest season – perhaps serving as metaphor for a second “Exodus” or salvation for God’s people, while also serving as a subtle allusion to Jesus’ time on earth coming to an end.

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-2)