

Sunday of the Passion  
Cycle B RCL

Liturgy of the Palms

Mark 11:1-11a

Mark's short account has been taken over and modified somewhat by both Matthew (21:1-11) and Luke (19:28-38). As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, the crowd recognizes him as the Messiah, the Son of David, and cries out to him in the traditional plea to the king: *hosanna* ("O [king], save!" Mark 11:9). The route from the Mount of Olives, across the Kidron Valley, and into the holy city is the traditional route of the new king of Judah *en route* to his coronation.

OR

John 12:12-16

This account of the triumphal entry is different in several respects from its parallels in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-10, Luke 19:28-40). Jesus, not his disciples, finds a donkey to ride (verse 14), and the author does not mistake the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9 to be referring to two animals as the author of Matthew construed it (Matthew 21:7). According to John, the crowds' fascination with Jesus centers on the raising of Lazarus rather than on the advent of a new king.

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

In Jewish tradition this psalm is one of the *Hallel* ("praise") psalms sung before and after the Passover meal. It is an individual *psalm of thanksgiving*. The opening of the temple gates to the psalmist (118:19-20) suggests that the deliverance is not only from mortal illness but also from an illness such as leprosy that had left the psalmist maimed or unclean and hence unqualified to enter the temple precincts. Particularly interesting in this psalm are the many descriptions of liturgical activity, and in 118:19-29 we may have a rather explicit description of a service of thanksgiving.

Liturgy of the Word

Isaiah 50:4-9a

The so-called "Second Isaiah" (Isaiah 40-56) was largely composed in Babylon during the captivity of the Jews in that city from 597 BCE (first deportation) and 586 BCE (second deportation) until 539 BCE when the Persian, Cyrus II, defeated the Babylonians and annexed it to the Persian Empire. Bernhard Duhm at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century proposed that Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6, 50:4-9, and 52:13-53:12 derived from a distinct source generally known as the Servant Songs. These songs, however, are integral of the message of the Second Isaiah and may indeed come from the prophet's hand. Here the prophet himself appears to be the "servant," vindicated by God despite the violence of his oppressors. Whether the servant in a poem is an individual or a group, the figure appears always to connote the chastened Israel.

Psalm 31: 9-16

This psalm includes both a *lament* (verses 1-18), from which today's Response derives, and a *thanksgiving* (19-24). As is the case with several of the laments, the complaints are fairly general, thus allowing worshipers to use the prayer in many different situations; but the principal complaints are about enemies and physical ailments. After praying such a lament, the worshiper would return to the Temple to thank God for fulfilling the petition. This public declaration of God's faithfulness was designed to encourage others to call upon the Lord in times of distress.

Philippians 2:5-11

Scholars often refer to this passage as the "Christ Hymn," and most believe that Paul has cited it from the living tradition of the church, having altered it only with the addition of the words "even death on a cross" (2:8).

Mark 14:1-15:47 or Mark 15:15:1-39 (40-47)

Mark's account of Jesus' passion is the source for those of both Matthew and Luke. Nevertheless, certain unmistakable Markan themes occur. Jesus' death on the cross is the occasion for the splitting of the Temple veil which hides the presence of God, enthroned upon the Ark of the Covenant. Thus, the death of Jesus brings access to God in a new and unexpected way. This completes the theme introduced as early as Mark 2:10 that the Son of Man has the authority heretofore reserved for the Temple cultus to forgive sins. The citation of Psalm 22:1 in Aramaic at Mark 15:34 (rendered in Hebrew in Matthew 27:46 and absent altogether from Luke and John) is the third citation of Jesus' words in Aramaic in the Gospel. It is no accident that the first two occasions (Mark 5:41, 7:34) are within the context of healings. The death of Jesus for Mark is the great healing event in human history. When Jesus dies, the truth of his life and death can no longer be hidden; and even an unnamed Roman centurion can recognize that Jesus was Son of God (Mark 15:39).

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