

LENTEN STUDIES 2021 WESTERN HEIGHTS UNITING CHURCH THE LAST WEEK



I RECOMMEND THAT EACH STUDY IS COMMENCED WITH A TIME OF PRAYER, SPOKEN OR QUIET, ASKING FOR THE SPIRIT OF GOD TO HELP US UNDERSTAND THROUGH OUR DISCUSSION, THINKING, READING.

STUDY 1

In Mark's Gospel, the days from Palm Sunday to Easter are clearly defined.

Palm Sunday Mk.11:1 "When they were approaching Jerusalem..." (Study 1. Feb 21-28)

Monday Mk.11:12 "On the following day..." (Study 2. March 1-7)

Tuesday Mk.11:20 "In the morning..." (Study 3. March 8-14)

Wednesday Mk.14:1 "It was two days before the Passover..." (Study 4. March 15-21)

Thursday Mk.14:12 "On the first day of unleavened bread..." (Study 5. Mar 22-28)

Friday Mk15:1 "As soon as it was morning..."

Saturday Mk 15:42 and 16:1 The Sabbath

Sunday Mark 16:2 "Very early on the first day of the week..."

I'm hoping that studies will be done before Holy Week and the Holy Week Services on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at 7.30pm will be seen as the conclusion of the studies and help us enter into Easter with a deep sense of connection.

Wednesday Evening service will allow us to reflect on Jesus' act of washing his disciples feet, as we wash each other's hands.

Thursday Evening reflections will have us sit with the disciples as they journey through that Last Supper

Good Friday Evening, we go to Golgotha with Jesus.

Easter Morning we bring flowers from our own gardens and "Blossom The Cross" in joyful celebration of the resurrection, then carry the cross out in front of the church where it will sit for the Sunday and Monday as a shout of joy to the world

FOR DISCUSSION:

- Why might Mark have been so specific about the seven days leading up to the crucifixion?

- We sometimes refer to Holy Week as Passion Week.
What was Jesus 'passionate' about?

Mark 11:1-11 When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, 'Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" just say this, "The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, 'What are you doing, untying the colt?' ⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, 'Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' ¹¹ Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Borg & Crossan, in their book "The Last Week" write:

Two processions entered Jerusalem on a spring day in the year 30. It was the beginning of the week of Passover, the most sacred week of the Jewish year. In the centuries since, Christians have celebrated this day as Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week. With its climax of Good Friday and Easter, it is the most sacred week of the Christian year.

One was a peasant procession, the other an imperial procession. From the east, Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives,

cheered by his followers. Jesus was from the peasant village of Nazareth, his message was about the kingdom of God, and followers came from the peasant class. They had journeyed to Jerusalem from Galilee, about a hundred miles to the north, a journey that is the central section and the central dynamic of Mark's Gospel. Mark's story of Jesus and the kingdom of God has been aiming for Jerusalem, pointing toward Jerusalem. It has now arrived. On the opposite side of the city, from the west, Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Idumea, Judea and Samaria, entered Jerusalem at the head of a column of imperial cavalry and soldiers. Jesus' procession proclaimed the kingdom of God. Pilate's proclaimed the power of empire. **The two processions embody the central conflict of the week that led to Jesus's crucifixion.**

Pilate's Entry

Cavalry on horses, foot soldiers
Leather armour, helmets, weapons
Banners, gold eagles mounted
on poles
Sun glinting on metal and gold
Tramp, tramp, of marching feet
Beating of drums, swirling dust
Silent onlookers, curious, awed,
resentful
Power, imperial theology.
Caesar – Son of God, Lord and
Saviour

Jesus' Entry

Jesus, riding a colt, never
ridden before.
(Look at Zechariah 9:9-10)
Clothes and leafy branches
spread on his path.
"Hosanna, blessed is the one
who comes in the name of the
Lord."
"Blessed is the coming
kingdom of our ancestor
David"

DISCUSS WHAT THIS CENTRAL CONFLICT MIGHT BE.

How is it expressed in Jesus' actions?

Note the type of kingdom that Jesus is calling to mind by his actions (Zech 9:9-10 would have been on everyone's mind that day)

DO YOU SEE THIS CONFLICT PLAYED OUT TODAY, IN YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES, YOUR OWN WORLD?

JERUSALEM

To understand what Jesus' entry into Jerusalem meant, we need to understand more about Jerusalem.

It was established by King David as the centre of his power and David's reign had become the symbol of what Judaism was.

But Jerusalem has become the centre of Roman power. The domination system that Rome established has been collaborated with by Herod the Great, by his son Archelaus and now Herod Antipas, the younger son.

Herod the Great had built the new temple, but it was a massive showpiece. It stood on a platform that covered 40 acres. It had been the site of a massacre of 3000 devout Jews by Archelaus. The priests retained power by cooperation and collaboration with Rome,

On one hand the temple mediated the presence of God and dispensed forgiveness. On the other, it exclusively put those very attributes into the hands of the powerful and wealthy.

In every way, the many were ruled by these few: the monarchy, the nobility, the aristocracy, the religious and administrative elite.

Between half and two thirds of the wealth of the land, which came from agricultural production, went into the coffers of the wealthy and powerful

via the structures of taxation, indentured labour through debt, and land ownership laws.

Religion legitimated this. The King ruled by divine right. He was known as the Son of God. Rome placed its administrative tasks with local rulers; in Israel that was the temple authorities. So temple authority was subsumed under imperial authority and as such owed 'tribute' to the Emperor, both in loyalty and money. The Priests were mostly of the new elites created by Herod the Great, mostly by killing everyone else. They were the landowners, but this was only possible by subverting the Biblical laws on land ownership that forbade buying and selling of land.

Land was acquired by two means, royal decree and by confiscation because of debt. Because the wealthy owned most of the land, they turned it to cash cropping, so rendering those who lived on the land utterly dependent on the elite. The land could not be used for growing your own food so instead of producing the basics, the peasants had to buy them.

Wealth poured into Jerusalem. The temple and its authorities were at the heart of this. It was not just individuals who were corrupt, it was the whole domination system.

This helps understanding of the rage of the elite when John the Baptist, or Jesus, claimed another means of forgiving sins (Mark 2:7). Only the temple had that right. All authority rests in the temple, in Jerusalem.

This is the Jerusalem that Jesus entered into on Palm Sunday.

Two processions entered Jerusalem that day. The same question, the same alternative faces those who would be faithful to Jesus today.

Which procession are we in? Which procession do we want to be in?

This is the question of Palm Sunday, and of our journey through Lent.

- **READ LUKE 19:41-44**
- **CLOSE WITH A TIME OF QUIET PRAYER.**