



## Seeking: Where Are You Headed?

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### Gathering

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*Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.  
This week, it would be appropriate to find a **purple cloth** or scarf to signify that we are in a time of preparation. Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.*



### Gathering

Today we begin our journey with Jesus towards the cross and beyond.

Today, we ask the question: where are you headed?

Perhaps it is a question we could ask of Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, as he rides into conflict and betrayal.

Perhaps it is a question we could ask of ourselves as we live our lives, as we worship and work together in this place...

### Light Candle

We light the candle - focussing our attention, allowing ourselves to be drawn to its flame. We look to Jesus, the light of the world, a light that shines even in the darkest of times offering hope and healing.

### Acknowledgement of Country

The Ancient of Days, breathed life into this Land and her Peoples. From time beyond our reckoning the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have blessed this place through their care and concern.

From river to ocean, from campfire to hearth

***may the First Nations who have cared for this land be blessed.***

From breath to song,

from step to dance

***may those who follow your Songlines guide us on the journey to living honourably in this place.***

From greeting to Amen,

from silence to chorus

***may our worship join with the voices of the First Nations of this Land.***

*(c) 2017, A.Koh-Butler, This land is God's land and God's Spirit dwells here*

### Call to Worship

It is only one week, but this week is a wilderness of emotion and heartbreak.

Everything that could happen happens:

celebration, betrayal, feasts, and love made real,

hearts are broken, and faith questioned.

It all happens here in this one week.

It is a wildness that we know.  
We have wandered through it,  
and we come again today to find God never strays  
but is hidden behind every rock.  
God's reflection is in every puddle and every stream.  
God is in all these days,  
just as God will be a part of every day of our lives.

*Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for 2 April 2023, p.85*

### **Prayer**

Lord God,  
maker of humankind,  
the first of your works  
jeweller behind each star,  
crafter of all creation,  
we praise you and adore you.  
As we gather this day  
we give you thanks for all that has been and entrust to you all that is yet to be.  
As we gather this day  
we pause to reflect on the things we could have done differently;  
the things we could have done, the words we could have said and left unsaid.

*Pause*

Creator,  
listener,  
redeemer,  
be with us  
as we worship you this day.  
These things we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

*Spill The Beans, Issue 46, Resources for 2 April 2023, p,53*

### **Sing - Jesus Is Coming (Seasons 2-28)**

*Palm Sunday often brings a tradition of waving palm branches and singing Hosanna.  
So we are going to sing Hosanna, and if you feel the need to clap or wave your hands, you  
are more than welcome!*

Jesus is coming,  
pave the way with branches.  
Jesus is coming, hosanna! (*repeat*)  
Hosanna! Jesus is coming.  
Hosanna to the Prince of Peace. (*repeat*)

Hope for the downtrod, pave the way...

Release for the captives...

Land for the landless...

Jesus is coming...

*Words and music: © 1999 Bret Hesla*

### **Prayer of Confession - intro**

For today's prayer of confession we are going to read the Palm Sunday story together. As we read through the story, we will pause to admit the places where we so often and so easily could change the narrative.  
So join with me, trusting that no matter what we do or don't do, this story ends with love.  
Let us pray:

## Prayer

### Matthew 21:1-11

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.'

***God, forgive us for the times when we do not trust your word and do not follow where you lead. We long to be the ones who can go into the village ahead of you. Forgive us when we play it safe.***

<sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

<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.'

***God, forgive us for forgetting that you are always coming toward us, you are always drawing near. Help us find you in our midst.***

<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.

***Creator God, forgive us for the moments when we choose greed over generosity, or when we choose our self-image over our loyalty to you. Give us the courage to be unabashed in our faith. Give us the strength to throw our coats 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!

***Son of David, give us the conviction to shout your name from the rooftop. Give us the wisdom to sing, "Hosanna!"***

<sup>10</sup>When [Jesus] 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.'

***With hope in our hearts we pray to you, Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. Amen.***

### Words of Assurance

Family of faith, there will be days when we withhold our praise.

There will be days when we dare not follow.

There will be days when we ignore God's call,  
when we choose comfort over courage,  
and ourselves over others.

But even on those days, even on our worst days, we belong to God.

Hear and believe the good news of the gospel:

***Nothing can separate us from God's love.***

***We are loved, forgiven, and sent to serve. Hosanna! Amen.***

*Sanctified Art, Words for Worship*

**Sing** - Ride On, Ride On (tune: TIS 348)

*We sing a hymn - the tune is familiar, the words echo the original but offer some different thoughts on Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.*

Ride on, ride on, the time is right;  
The roadside crowd screams with delight;  
Palm branches mark the pilgrim way  
Where beggars squat and children play.

Ride on, ride on, though blind with tears,  
Though dumb to speak and deaf to jeers.  
Your path is clear, though few can tell  
Their garments pave the road to Hell.

Ride on, ride on, your critics wait,  
Intrigue and rumour circulate;  
New lies abound in word and jest,  
And truth becomes a suspect guest.

Ride on, ride on, the room is let,  
The wine matured, the saw is whet;  
And dice your death-throes shall attend  
Though faith, not fate, dictates your end.

Ride on, ride on, while well aware  
That those who shout and wave and stare  
Are mortals who, with common breath,  
Can crave for life and lust for death.

Ride on, ride on, God's love demands.  
Justice and peace lie in your hands.  
Evil and angel voices rhyme:  
This is the man and this the time.

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### Listening for God's Voice

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**Reading:** Philippians 2:5-11

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

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him  
and gave him the name  
that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of 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.

For the Word of God in Scripture,  
for the Word of God among us,  
for the Word of God within us,  
**Thanks be to God!**

**Sing** - He Is Lord (P&W 32)

He is Lord, he is Lord!  
he is risen from the dead and he is Lord.  
every knee shall bow,  
every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

© 1977, Martin V. Frey

**Reflection**

Holy God,  
Sometimes it's hard to hear you over the hosannas.  
Sometimes it's hard to hear you over the noise of city streets.  
Sometimes it's hard to hear you over our racing thoughts, our mental to-do lists,  
or our desire to fit in.  
Sometimes it is hard to hear you in this noisy world.  
So just as you stopped traffic in Jerusalem,  
stop traffic here.  
Pause the rush.  
Open the gates.  
Dwell among us,  
until your Word is all we can hear.  
We are listening.  
We are laying down our cloaks.  
Amen.

*Sanctified Art, Words for Worship*

Where are you headed?

Some years ago, Narelle and I were travelling and had booked a bus tour. There were several tours leaving from the same bus stop and you can imagine the tour guides all trying to make sure they had the right people on the right bus going to the right place. We were happily seated on our bus, with the tour guide up the front beginning her spiel, when another couple got on, she turned to them and said, in this tone, "Where're *you* goin'?"

It's the kind of question you ask when the driver has taken a wrong turn or someone turns up somewhere they are not supposed to.

Where are you headed? Where're *you* goin'?

So when Jesus turns up to Jerusalem, and asks his disciples to go find a donkey, "where are you headed?" or "where are you going?" are not unreasonable questions...

Particularly when Jesus constructs confrontation.

Particularly when Jesus constructs confrontation.

And while we want to think of Jesus riding a donkey as an act of humility, I want to suggest that there is not much humble going on here.

The gospel writers all tell us that Jesus gives instruction to his disciples to go and find a donkey. In Matthew's version, they are looking for a donkey "*and her colt*" (21:2).

They bring the animals to him and he rides them into the city amidst the crowd waving branches and laying their coats on the road and shouting, "Save us, Son of David!" (21:9).

The donkey is entirely appropriate for Hebrew royalty as the crowd recognises in referring to him as the "Son of David".

As the gospel writer emphasises, there is no doubt that the disciples and the crowds, and the Jewish leaders, would have recognised the scene as one described by the prophet Zechariah, where Israel's victorious king comes "humble and riding on a donkey" bringing peace to the nations (Zechariah 9:9-10).

So while we might well agree that Jesus is a humble man, this event, this parade, this donkey is all about Jesus claiming that he is this victorious king - which was almost guaranteed to provoke both the Jewish religious leaders and their Roman rulers.

Furthermore, this was the Passover festival. Jerusalem would have been heaving, crowded with pilgrims coming to the temple for the festival. And just like us, no one likes anyone rocking the boat in the middle of a major religious festival!

Some scholars suggest that there were two parades that day and that, as Jesus enters Jerusalem from one side of the city, the Roman garrison entered from the other side. But I don't think Jesus was intending to highlight a contrast between his own poverty and humility and the power and wealth of Rome. Jesus is clearly here presenting himself as God's chosen one, the saviour of Israel - and the people in the crowd are more than prepared to celebrate his arrival.

Whether or not there was another parade in Jerusalem on the same day, then Jesus has, in one afternoon, managed to offend both the Roman and Jewish leaders alike.

He creates the confrontation.

And he continues it when he immediately enters the temple and upends the tables of the traders and then, according to Matthew's account, continues to heal people who are blind and lame (Matthew 21:12-17).

In this moment, I think Jesus knew he was pushing buttons and that things could get ugly. But I don't know whether Jesus knew how serious things would get for him.

Alongside, Matthew's description of the parade is placed what it thought to be an early hymn:

"Let the same mind be in you as in Christ Jesus...

becoming obedient to the point of death...

[that] at the name of 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" (Philippians 2:5, 8, 10-11).

What does it mean for us to declare "Jesus is Lord"?

While we might easily recognise ourselves in the crowd waving palm branches and celebrating Jesus as God's chosen one, the one who will bring peace to the nations, what does it mean for us to be willing to offer ourselves in service and obedience even if that course brings ridicule and even death?

Throughout the coming week, we will enter again the story of Jesus' final days and hours. It is sometimes emotional and challenging to engage deeply in this story.

And it is often easier to tune out and stay in a space of familiarity with the events and not let its meaning touch us.

But I want to encourage you to engage - to engage deeply in the story of Jesus steeped as it is in betrayal, denial and death - and to ask ourselves in this story, where are you headed? Where am I headed?

And am I, are we, prepared to take the path Jesus has taken?

*Make palm crosses... instructions here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiOXGxaGbUA>*

Let us pray...

As we remember the events of the last days and hours of Jesus' life,  
give us courage and grace.

May these crosses remind us of our fragility,  
just as they remind us of the extent of your love.

May we have the courage to remain with you,  
and to choose your path, even when we find ourselves despised and betrayed.  
Hold on to us and we hold on to you, we pray. Amen.

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### Responding

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**Sing** - Who Is This Man (Tune: Londonderry Air (The Source 199))

*This song captures, I think, some of the questions we might ask as we encounter Jesus, and invites us to walk together into this week of remembering...*

Who is this man, who gathered people to  
him,  
and touched their lives along each dusty  
way;

who spoke to all with passion and with  
peacefulness

And valued all their ordinary days?

Who is this man, who at the long day's  
ending,

would draw apart to wait on God and pray,  
and, in that mystery that knows no ending,  
would find God's wisdom and would know  
God's words to say?

Who is this man, who gave to women  
dignity

in partnership of worth and equal grace,  
who listened to the stories that they told  
him,

and honoured each whatever was their  
place?

Who let them choose to come and join his  
company,  
and learned with them God's love for every  
race,

who showed to each the courage of their  
nature

to care and tend each lonely and suffering  
face?

Who is this man, who spoke to men of  
gentleness

and showed them all the children at his  
side,

who taught of love and justice for all  
people,

and took a towel and washed away their  
pride?

In him they saw the strength of truth and  
mercy,

and how he trusted God to be his guide;  
knew how he led them through

misunderstanding,

and then forgave them when they ran  
away to hide.

Who is this man, who calls us now to  
follow,

a shadow presence asking us to be  
companions of the way through this life's  
journey,

to live in truth, to set our tired world free?

So let us find each other now in  
partnership,

with ears to hear and eyes awake to see,  
that we might grow in grace and  
understanding

and walk beside that man who comes from  
Galilee.

## **Prayer for Others**

O God,  
on this day,  
at the start of this Holy Week,  
in this place,  
we seek your wisdom to not only discern your ways,  
but our own path through life.  
We seek your wisdom to know how to best live our lives:  
how to work with others,  
how to buy, eat, drink and live ethically,  
how to handle life's difficult choices.  
We seek your wisdom as we face the injustices in our world.  
We seek wisdom for those in positions of leadership in our communities, country and churches.  
We seek wisdom for us as we seek to reach out to those around us and around our globe.  
We seek wisdom for those who care for others in hospitals, in rehabilitation centres and hospices.  
We especially pray for those amongst us who are unwell in body, mind or spirit,  
or who are grieving for loved ones,  
or who are waiting for surgery  
or who are having to make major decisions.  
And we pray for people in all parts of the world who struggle to put food on the table for their families or who are living in places of violence and war. Bring aid and peace, we pray.  
As another Holy Week begins, we seek to walk with you.  
May your wisdom be found in the week ahead  
and may we be enlightened,  
transformed,  
inspired  
and accompanied.  
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

*Adapted from Spill The Beans, Issue 46, Resources for 2 April 2023, p,54*

## **Offering**

*As we have received, so we consider our response...*

*We make space now to think about what we have heard and seen today and consider our response.*

*As we make our offering - we remember again that this is not just about money - either here in the plate or through a bank transfer - this is also about how we are generous with our time and energy and gifts; and about how we resolve to live differently because we have encountered the living Christ.*

## **Listen** - Land of The Seeking (Sanctified Art)

*This song accompanies us as we look towards the cross - it invites us to inhabit the Land of the Seeking... <https://vimeo.com/800216630>*

*Let us pray...*

As we offer our gifts this day,  
be it time, talent or treasure, may you,  
Holy Wisdom,  
guide us how to use them  
to bring love and light to our world. So be it. Amen.

*Spill The Beans, Issue 46, Resources for 2 April 2023, p,53*



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## Sending

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**Sing** - Hosanna, Loud Hosanna (Tune: TIS 361)

*We go as we began, singing Hosanna!*

Hosanna, loud hosanna  
the faithful children sang;  
through city street and temple  
their joyous anthem rang;  
to Jesus who had blessed them  
had hugged them to his chest,  
the children sang their praises  
that he, in turn, be blessed.

From Olivet they followed  
among the shouting crowd,  
their leafy palm-branch waving  
and chanting clear and loud;

Jesus, the son of David,  
rode on in lowly state,  
and smiled to see the children  
crowding the city gate.

"Hosanna in the highest!"  
That ancient song we sing,  
for Christ is our Redeemer,  
who came as Servant-King.  
O may we ever praise him  
with heart and life and voice.  
He walks life's pathways with us.  
Come, let us all rejoice!

*Original Words: Jennette Threlfall*

*Revised by Nigel Weaver 1993 in the 1995 'Lent, Easter, Pentecost' issue of Gathering*

### Sending Affirmation

We believe in a God who walks headfirst into the world's suffering,  
***who lights a candle in the darkest night,  
who pulls back the curtain so we can see the stars.***

We believe in a God who does not shy away from the truth,  
***who is bold in seeking justice, and humble in taking power.***

We believe in a God who sees our hurt and wraps love around it,  
***cocooning us in hope, tethering us to one another.***

We believe in a God who is always carrying us from the pain of the world  
into the hope of a new day.

***That is where God is headed.***

***That is where we follow.***

***May it be so.***

***Amen.***

### Blessing

As you leave this place,  
may God bless you with seeking.  
Seek out the hungry.  
Seek the weary.  
Seek the good in every person you pass.  
Seek out the hopeful.  
Seek the faithful.  
Seek God in each of us.  
As you seek and as you wonder,  
may you find what you are looking for.  
In the name of our loving God,  
who is always seeking us,  
go now in peace. Amen.

*Liturgy adapted from material from:  
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[www.sanctifiedart.org](http://www.sanctifiedart.org)  
Rev Kath Merrifield  
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