



St Stephen's Williamstown Uniting Church in Australia
Service of the Word at Home - Palm Passion Sunday during Coronavirus Lockdown
Sunday 5th April 2020 & Holy Week

Prepared by Rev S. Juliette Maua'i

Place something purple, a piece of green foliage, a cross and Bible on a table (if possible)

Prepare some reflective music, hymns, or songs to play as you feel prompted

Readings: Matthew 21:1-11 & Matthew 26 :1—28 :20

Call to Worship *(adapted from Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29)*

O, I will give thanks to the LORD, for he is good
his steadfast love endures forever!
Come, O God, and dwell in this home
That we may forever remain in your grace
For You are my God, and I will give thanks to you
Forever, You, are my God! Amen.

Welcome

Greetings dear St Stephens – the grace and peace of the Lord be ever with you!

Opening Prayer

God of wilderness and water, your Son was baptized and tempted as we are in this time of Coronavirus.
Guide us through this season, that we may not avoid struggle, but that we will open ourselves to blessing,
through the cleansing depths of repentance and the heaven-rending words of the Spirit. AMEN.

The story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and then of his passion – betrayal, arrest, torture and interrogation, and crucifixion as a criminal – form an essential part of the Christian story. Each of the gospel writers told that story with particular aims and individual messages. Yet for many worshipers, it is rare to hear the story in its entirety. The script expands on the traditional narratives of the Entry into Jerusalem, continuing to recount Jesus' cleansing of the Temple; beginning Earlier with the Anointing at Bethany, and concludes after the burial with the posting of the guard at the tomb.

*As you sit in the presence of God during this time of COVID-19, Coronavirus, be of good courage!
The journey we are on in this season is unknown. The Disciples and the People of God were also in a season of uncertainty.
But Jesus was with them, right there; just as Jesus is right there with you and your household.
Journey now with Jesus, Peter, the disciples and the crowds,
journey with your Lord, and Saviour,
into the uncertainty of this season as People of God. Your St Stephens Sisters and Brothers, our young people and your Minister
are with you in spirit and Prayer!
Be prepared and remain steadfast!
Be assured that in this Nazarene man from Galilee, Jesus Son of God,
is with you now; is walking with you in this season of Lent; in this season of COVID-19;
and towards the Cross at Calvary, where you will come to know that God's steadfast love endures forever!
Imagine you are in this story. Read and speak the parts. Pause and ponder at NARRATOR's part.
and share the journey of Palm Passion Sunday from the Gospel of Matthew.*

Matthew 21:1-11 - Jesus Enters Jerusalem and the Temple

Narrator: As they approached Jerusalem, entering Beth-Phage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent off two disciples² with the instructions,

Jesus "Go into the village straight ahead of you, and immediately you will find a tethered donkey with her colt standing beside her. Untie them and lead them back to me.³ If anyone questions you, say, 'The Rabbi needs them.' Then they will let them go at once."

Narrator:⁴This came about to fulfill what was said through the prophet:⁵"Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Your Sovereign comes to you without display, riding on a donkey, on a colt — the foal of a beast of burden.'"⁶ So the disciples went off and did what Jesus had ordered.⁷ They brought the donkey and her colt, and after they laid their cloaks on the animals, Jesus mounted and rode toward the city.

The Procession of Palms

Narrator: ⁸Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while some began to cut branches from the trees and lay them along the path. ⁹The crowds—those who went in front of Jesus and those who followed—were all shouting

Crowd: “Hosanna to the Heir to the House of David! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Most High! Hosanna in the highest!”

Narrator ¹⁰As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred to its depths, demanding, “Who is this?” ¹¹And the crowd kept answering,

(Waving palms/greenery)

**Crowd: “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee!”
Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming. Hosanna! Hosanna to the Prince of Peace.**

(Lay your palms down)

Jesus in the Temple

Narrator: ¹²When Jesus entered the Temple, he drove out all those who were selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those selling doves. ¹³He said to them,

Jesus “Scripture says, ‘My house is called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of thieves!”

Narrator: ¹⁴Those who were blind or couldn’t walk came to him in the Temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵When the chief priests and teachers of the Law saw the wonderful things Jesus did throughout the Temple area, especially when they heard the children shouting:

Crowd: “Hosanna to the Heir to the House of David!”

Narrator: They asked him: ¹⁶“Do you hear what the children are shouting?”

Jesus “Yes! Have you never read, ‘From the mouths of children and nursing babies, you have brought forth praise?’”

Narrator: ¹⁷After leaving them, Jesus went out to Bethany to spend the night.

Intercessory Prayer

God of the Living,

You sculpted a people for yourself out of the rocks of wilderness and fasting.

We are caught between joy and despair,

we yearn for the fulfillment of your desire, O God,

beyond the brokenness and neediness of this life, and what we now face.

Give us grace to share one another’s burdens in humble service and in creative ways to communicate with each other.

Help us as we take up your invitation to prayer and simplicity,

that the discipline of these forty days and the days of living through Coronavirus,

may sharpen our hunger for the feast of your holy friendship,

and whet our thirst for the living water you offer through Jesus Christ.

Pray: The Lord’s Prayer

(You may wish to conclude Palm Sunday here in Silence... and resume the Passion Story throughout Holy Week until Maundy Thursday)

Hymn/Song/Music

The Passion According to St Matthew - Matthew 26 :1—28 :20

Conspiracy Against Jesus Begins

Narrator: Jesus told the disciples, ²“Passover starts in two days, and the Chosen One will be handed over to be crucified.” ³Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, Caiaphas. ⁴They planned to arrest Jesus under some pretext and execute him— ⁵“But not during the Festival,” they agreed, “or we might have a riot on our hands.”

Anointing At Bethany

Narrator: ⁶Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the house of Simon, who had leprosy, ⁷a woman approached Jesus with an alabaster jar of very expensive ointment. She poured it on his head while he reclined at the table. ⁸The disciples, witnessing this, were indignant.

Disciples: “What a waste!” ⁹“This could have been sold at a high price, and the money given to needier people.”

Jesus: ¹⁰Jesus, aware of their concern, said, “Why do you upset the woman? She has done me a good deed. ¹¹You’ll always have poor people with you, but you won’t always have me. ¹²When she poured the oil on my body,

she was preparing me for burial. ¹³The truth is, wherever the Good News is proclaimed in the world, she will be remembered for what she has done for me.”

Conspiracy Continues

Narrator: ¹⁴One of the Twelve, the one named Judas Iscariot, went off to the chief priests ¹⁵and said, “What are you willing to give me if I hand Jesus over to you?” They paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶And from that moment he looked for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

The Passover Meal

Narrator: ¹⁷On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came up to Jesus and said, “Where do you want us to prepare the Passover for you?” ¹⁸Jesus told them to go to a certain person in the city and say,

Jesus: “The Teacher says, ‘My appointed time draws near. I am to celebrate the Passover in your house.’”

Narrator: ¹⁹The disciples did as Jesus ordered and prepared the Passover supper. ²⁰When it grew dark, he reclined at table with the Twelve. ²¹And while they were eating he said,

Jesus: “The truth is, one of you is about to betray me.”

Narrator: ²²They were greatly distressed and started asking him in turn, “Surely, it is not I, Teacher?” ²³Jesus replied,

Jesus: “The one who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will hand me over. ²⁴The Chosen One will go as the scriptures foretold—but woe to the one by whom the Chosen One is betrayed! It would be better for that one never to have been born at all.”

Narrator: ²⁵Then Judas, who was betraying Jesus, said, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” Jesus answered,

Jesus: “You have said it yourself.”

²⁶During the meal Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to the disciples. “Take this and eat it,” Jesus said. “This is my body.” ²⁷Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them. “Drink from it, all of you,” he said. ²⁸“This is my blood, the blood of the Covenant, which will be poured out on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹The truth is, I will not drink this fruit of the vine again until the day when I drink it anew with you in my Abba’s kingdom.”

Narrator: ³⁰Then, after singing a hymn, they walked out to the Mount of Olives.

Hymn/Song/Music

Peter Promises Faithfulness

Jesus: ³¹Jesus then said to them, “Tonight you will all fall away because of me, for scripture says, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ ³²But after I have been raised, I will go to Galilee ahead of you.”

Narrator: ³³Peter responded, “Though all may fall away because of you, I never will!” ³⁴Jesus replied,

Jesus: “The truth is, before the cock crows tonight, you will deny me three times.”

Narrator: ³⁵Peter said, “Even if I must die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same. ³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane and said to the disciples,

Jesus Prays, and the Disciples Sleep

Jesus: “Stay here while I go over there and pray.”

³⁷Jesus took along Peter, James and John and started to feel grief and anguish. ³⁸Then he said to them,

Jesus: “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death. Please, stay here, and stay awake with me.” ³⁹Jesus went on a little further and fell prostrate in prayer: “Abba, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. But not what I want—what you want.”

Narrator: ⁴⁰When Jesus returned to the disciples, he found them asleep. He said to Peter,

Jesus: “Couldn’t you stay awake with me for even an hour?”

⁴¹Be on guard, and pray that you may not undergo trial. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” ⁴²Withdrawing a second time, Jesus prayed, “Abba, if this cup cannot pass me by without my drinking it, your will be done!”

Narrator: ⁴³Once more Jesus returned and found the disciples asleep; they could not keep their eyes open. ⁴⁴Jesus left them again, withdrew somewhat and prayed for a third time, saying the same words as before. ⁴⁵Finally Jesus returned to the disciples and said to them,

Jesus: “Are you still sleeping? Still taking your rest? The hour is upon us—the Chosen One is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Get up! Let us be on our way! Look, my betrayer is here.”

Betrayal and Arrest

Narrator: ⁴⁷While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived—accompanied by a great crowd with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. ⁴⁸Judas had arranged to give them a signal. “Whomever I embrace is the one,” he had said; “take hold of him.” ⁴⁹He immediately went over to Jesus and said, “Shalom, Rabbi!” and embraced him. ⁵⁰Jesus said to Judas,

Jesus: “Friend, just do what you’re here to do!”

Narrator: At that moment, the crowd surrounded them, laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. ⁵¹Suddenly, one of those who accompanied Jesus drew a sword and slashed at the high priest’s attendant, cutting off an ear.
⁵²Jesus said,

Jesus: “Put your sword back where it belongs. Those who live by the sword die by the sword. ⁵³Don’t you think I can call on my Abba God to provide over twelve legions of angels at a moment’s notice? ⁵⁴But then how would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen this way?” Am I a robber, that you have come armed with swords and clubs to arrest me? Every day I sat teaching in the Temple precincts, yet you never arrested me.”

Narrator: ⁵⁶All this happened in fulfillment of the writings of the prophets. Then all the disciples deserted Jesus and fled.

Jesus before Caiaphas

Narrator: ⁵⁷Those who had seized Jesus led him off to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the religious scholars and elders had convened. ⁵⁸Peter followed at a distance as far as the high priest’s residence. Going inside, Peter sat down with the guards to await the outcome. ⁵⁹The chief priests, with the whole Sanhedrin, were busy trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put him to death. ⁶⁰They discovered none, despite the many false witnesses who took the stand.

Narrator: Finally two came forward ⁶¹who stated, “This man has declared, ‘I can destroy God’s sanctuary and rebuild it in three days.’” ⁶²The high priest rose and addressed Jesus, “Have you no answer? What about this testimony leveled against you?” ⁶³But Jesus remained silent. The high priest then said to him, “I order you to tell us under oath, before the living God, whether or not you are the Messiah, the Firstborn of God?” Jesus replied,

Jesus: ⁶⁴“You have said it yourself. But I tell you: soon you will see the Chosen One seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Narrator: ⁶⁵At this, the high priest tore his robes and said, “Blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? You yourselves have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶What is your verdict?” They responded, “He deserves death!” ⁶⁷Then they spat at his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped Jesus, ⁶⁸saying, “Play the prophet for us, Messiah! Who struck you?”

Peter Denies Jesus

Narrator: ⁶⁹While this was happening, Peter was sitting in the courtyard. One of the attendants came over and said, “You were with Jesus the Galilean too, weren’t you?” ⁷⁰But Peter denied it in front of everyone. He said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about!” ⁷¹When Peter went out to the gate, another attendant saw him and said to those nearby, “This one was with Jesus of Nazareth.” ⁷²Again he cursed and denied it: “I don’t know him!”

Narrator: ⁷³A little while later, some bystanders came over to Peter and said, “You certainly are one of them! Even your accent gives you away!” ⁷⁴At that, Peter began cursing and swore, “I don’t know the man!” Just then a rooster began to crow, ⁷⁵and Peter remembered the prediction Jesus had made: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” Peter went out and cried bitterly.

Jesus Sent to Pilate; Judas Despairs

Narrator (Reader 2) ^{27: 1}At daybreak, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took formal action against Jesus to put him to death. ²They bound him and led him away to be handed over to Pilate, the governor.

Narrator (Reader 3) ³When he saw that Jesus had been condemned, Judas, who had betrayed Jesus, felt remorse. He took the thirty pieces of silver back to the chief priests and elders, ⁴and said, “I have sinned! I have betrayed innocent blood!” “What’s that to us?” they answered. “That’s your affair!” ⁵So Judas flung the money into the sanctuary and left. Then he went off and

hanged himself. ⁶The chief priests picked up the silver, observing, “It’s against the Law to deposit this in the Temple treasury, since it is blood money.” ⁷After some discussion, they used the money to buy Potter’s Field as a cemetery for foreigners. ⁸ That is why that field, even today, is called Blood Field. ...

Narrator: ¹¹ Then Jesus was arraigned before Pontius Pilate, the governor, who questioned him. “Are you the King of the Jews?”
Jesus replied,

Jesus: “You say that I am.”

Narrator: ¹² Yet when Jesus was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no reply. ¹³ Pilate said to Jesus, “Surely you hear how many charges they bring against you?” ¹⁴ But Jesus did not answer Pilate on a single count, much to the governor’s surprise.

Narrator: ¹⁵ Now, on the occasion of a festival, the governor was accustomed to release one prisoner, whomever the crowd would designate.

¹⁶ At the time they were holding a notorious prisoner named Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when the crowd gathered, Pilate asked them, “Which one do you wish me to release for you? Barabbas? Or Jesus, the so-called Messiah?” ¹⁸ Pilate knew, of course, that it was out of jealousy that they had handed Jesus over. ¹⁹ While Pilate was still presiding on the bench, his wife sent him a message:

Pilate’s Wife: “Have nothing to do with that innocent man. I had a dream about him last night which has been troubling me all day long.”

Narrator: ²⁰ But the chief priests and elders convinced the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas, and have Jesus put to death. ²¹ So when the governor asked them, “Which one do you wish me to release for you?” they all cried,

Crowd “Barabbas!”

Pilate: ²² Pilate said to them, “Then what am I to do with Jesus, the so-called Messiah?”

Crowd “Crucify him!”

Pilate: ²³ “Why? What crime has he committed?” Pilate asked. But they only shouted louder,

Crowd “Crucify him!”

Narrator: ²⁴ Pilate finally realized that he was getting nowhere with this—in fact, a riot was breaking out. Pilate called for water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, declaring as he did so, “I am innocent of this man’s blood. The responsibility is yours.”

²⁵ The whole crowd said in reply, “Let his blood be on us and on our children.” (*This needs context! see Holy Week and Anti-Semitism resources at the end of the service*) *

²⁶ At that, Pilate released Barabbas to them.

Jesus Humiliated, and taken to the Place of Crucifixion

Narrator: Pilate had Jesus whipped with a cat-o’-nine-tails, then handed him over to be crucified.

²⁷ The governor’s soldiers took Jesus inside the Praetorium and assembled the whole cohort around him. ²⁸ They stripped off his clothes and wrapped him in a scarlet military cloak. ²⁹ Weaving a crown out of thorns, they pressed it onto his head and stuck a reed in his right hand. Then they began to mock Jesus by dropping to their knees, saying, “All hail, King of the Jews!” ³⁰ They also spat at him. Afterward they took hold of the reed and struck Jesus on the head.

Narrator: ¹ Finally, when they had finished mocking him, they stripped him of the cloak, dressed him in his own clothes and led him off to crucifixion. ³² On their way out, they met a Cyrenian named Simon, whom they pressed into service to carry the cross.

³³ Upon arriving at a site called Golgotha—which means Skull Place—³⁴ they gave Jesus a drink of wine mixed with a narcotic herb, which Jesus tasted but refused to drink. ³⁵ Once they had nailed Jesus to the cross, they divided his clothes among them by rolling dice;

³⁶ then they sat down and kept watch over him. ³⁷ Above his head, they put the charge against him in writing: “This is Jesus, King of the Jews.”

The Cross

Narrator: ³⁸ Two robbers were crucified along with Jesus, one at his right and one at his left. ³⁹ People going by insulted Jesus, shaking their heads ⁴⁰ and saying,

Crowd “So you are the one who was going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Save yourself, why don’t you? Come down off that cross if you are God’s Own!”

⁴¹ The religious authorities also joined in the jeering:

Crowd⁴²“He saved others but he cannot save himself!
So he’s the King of Israel!
Let’s see him come down from that cross, and then we will believe in him.
⁴³ He trusts in God; let God rescue him now!
after all, he claimed to be God’s Own!”

⁴⁴The robbers who had been crucified with Jesus jeered at him in the same way.

Jesus Dies

Narrator:⁴⁵ At noon, a darkness fell over the whole land until about three in the afternoon. ⁴⁶At that hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice,

Jesus: “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” which means, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

Narrator:⁴⁷ This made some of the bystanders who heard it remark, “He is calling for Elijah!” ⁴⁸One of them hurried off and got a sponge. He soaked the sponge in cheap wine and, sticking it on a reed, tried to make Jesus drink. ⁴⁹The others said, “Leave him alone. Let’s see whether Elijah comes to his rescue.”

Narrator:⁵⁰ Once again, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, then he gave up his spirit.
Pause in silent prayer, or Play reflective music

Narrator:⁵¹ Suddenly, the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies was ripped in half from top to bottom. The earth quaked, boulders were split ⁵²and tombs were opened. Many bodies of holy ones who had fallen asleep were raised. ⁵³After Jesus’ resurrection, they came out of their tombs and entered the holy city, and appeared to many.

Narrator:⁵⁴ The centurion and his cohort, who were standing guard over Jesus’ body, were terror-stricken at seeing the earthquake and all that was happening, and said, “Clearly, this was God’s own!”

Narrator:⁵⁵ A group of women were present, looking on from a distance. These were the same women who had followed Jesus from Galilee as ministers to him. ⁵⁶Among them were Mary of Magdala; Mary, the mother of James and Joseph; and the mother of Zebedee’s children.

Burial

Narrator:⁵⁷ When evening fell, a wealthy man from Arimathea named Joseph, who had become a disciple of Jesus, ⁵⁸came to request the body of Jesus; Pilate issued an order for its release. ⁵⁹Taking the body, Joseph wrapped it in fresh linen ⁶⁰and laid it in his own tomb, which had been hewn out of rock. Then Joseph rolled a huge stone across the entrance of the tomb and went away.

⁶¹But Mary of Magdala and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb.

A Roman Guard Posted

Narrator:⁶² The next day—the one following the day of Preparation—the chief priests and the Pharisees called at Pilate’s residence

⁶³and said, “We recall that, while he was still alive, the impostor made the claim, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ ⁶⁴Therefore, please issue an order to keep the tomb under surveillance until the third day. Otherwise, Jesus’ disciples might go and steal his body and tell the people, ‘Jesus has been raised from the dead!’ This final deception would be worse than the first.” ⁶⁵Pilate said to them, “You have a guard. Go and secure the tomb as best you can.” ⁶⁶So they went to seal the tomb and post a guard.

Reflect in Silence

Closing Music

Hold the memory of the triumphal entrance into Jerusalem and the whole story of the passion of Jesus.

Through Holy Week - Sisters & Brothers in Christ may you Reflect, Pray, and Prepare for Maundy Thursday, and the days ahead.

God’s blessings and peace be always with you!

