

Holy Week Prayer Guide

24th – 31st March 2024



This guide covers the eight days from Palm Sunday to Easter Day, often referred to as Holy Week.

Each day we will look at one of the eight Psalms which are quoted in the Gospel accounts of the days leading up to Easter. Psalms are Hebrew songs which were written hundreds of years before Christ, but which the Gospels see as containing words which were fulfilled during that first Holy Week.

We hope that these Psalms will help us to focus on the significance of what happened during that extraordinary week. We encourage you to set aside some extra time each day to draw near to God, by working through the material in this guide, and being expectant that God will draw near to you as you do this.

If you are part of a small group or a ministry team within CBC, you may want to find a way to use the guide together, or to share with one another what God says to you during the week.

Format for each day

Each day there will be several things to do. Please try to do all of them each day – it need only take a few minutes, but the more time you give the better:

1. There is a ***Psalm to read***.

If you don't have a Bible of your own, you can find the words online at

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%201&version=NLT>

There is then a written reflection to help us think about the Psalm

2. We will be encouraged to ***pray*** in various ways
 3. There will be opportunities to ***respond***:
 - Through a worship video to listen to or join in with
 - By reflecting on one or two questions
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Palm Sunday (24th March)

Today's Psalm: 118

All four Gospels record that the crowds shouted words from Psalm 118 when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday: *Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*

Psalm 118 is a beautiful song of praise, probably originally written to celebrate a time of national deliverance, and perhaps sung by the leader of the people as he approached the Temple in Jerusalem. But the true hero is God, and the Psalm begins and ends with the words: *Give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his love endures forever.*

I wonder what made the crowds choose words from this Psalm as Jesus came riding into Jerusalem (and why the Pharisees were so outraged by their shouts). Did they recognise in this humble figure something of true kingship? Were they really thinking that he was going to deliver them from the Roman occupiers? What made them believe that he came in God's name?

And I wonder what Jesus was thinking as he listened to all the shouting, knowing what would happen to him later in the week. Luke tells us how he refused to rebuke the crowds, and how he wept – not for himself, but for the people of the city he was entering.

Dinah Roe Kendall's painting of Palm Sunday, set in a school in Sheffield (see <https://imago-arts.org/allegories-of-heaven-an-artist-explores-the-greatest-story-ever-told/>) reminds us that Jesus wants to ride into our lives, and challenges us about our response. I like the sense of joyful exuberance, but if you look carefully you can also see a large cross and a lamb – pointing forward to the week ahead.

Prayers

True and humble king, hailed by the crowd as Messiah: grant us the faith to know you and love you, that we may be found beside you on the way of the cross, which is the path of glory. Amen

(Now add your own prayers of response, before praying as suggested below.)

Pray for those who lead us, and for those whom we lead – in CBC, in our national life, in our families and places of work/study. Pray that all who lead will see and testify to the glory of Jesus. Thank God for those we know who are doing that.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/alCQ7fb0hEA> (Make Way)

To ponder today

What are your hopes and expectations for Easter? What would you shout if Jesus came past right now?

Monday 25th March

Today's Psalm: 8

Once he arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus asserted his kingly authority in the Temple, clearing away the traders so as to make room for others to worship. His actions caused his disciples to remember these words from Psalm 69, a Psalm we will revisit later in the week: *Zeal for your house will consume me.*

Shortly afterwards, some children responded by shouting praises in the Temple. The authorities disapproved, but Jesus quoted from Psalm 8: *From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise.*

The authorities did not seem to have a problem with people using the Temple for buying and selling, even if it left less space for prayer. But when Jesus challenged this, and the children started to shout *hosanna*, they became very upset. Their view of what worship should look like seemed to be quite different to that of Jesus, whose zeal for God's house did not rule out children shouting there.

Psalm 8 is one of my favourite Psalms: it expresses humanity's apparent insignificance in the huge universe which God has created, but also proclaims our significance to God and our important place in creation. It is a hymn of praise to God which also reminds us that our primary role on earth is to worship him.

I few years ago I remember reading a Lent book by Justin Welby and being struck by these simple but countercultural words: *A day without worship is a day wasted.*

Prayers

Lord Jesus, yesterday all around the world, Christians gathered for services and processions, making public statements of their faith. Please give courage and joy to all those in countries where Christians are marginalised or attacked, yet who still dare to proclaim today that you are Messiah, Christ, the Son of the living God. And for those who cannot openly speak the truth about you – may the stones cry out, may their lives shout as loud as any crowd, that you are the one who saves. Protect your family, Lord, we pray. Amen

(Now add your own prayers of response, before praying as suggested below.)

Pray for Christians in places and situations where it is particularly hard to worship openly, such as Afghanistan and North Korea. This year Holy Week falls within Ramadan; pray for the Lord to grant dreams and visions of Jesus to all those who are truly seeking after truth.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/F7CbR3ZXqdc> (Honour you Lord)

To ponder today

You may have worshipped God yesterday, but how will you worship him today? How can you encourage somebody else today to draw near to God in worship?

Tuesday 27th March

Today's Psalm: 41

Psalm 41 begins and ends with confident declarations of God's blessing and protection (v.1-3, 10-13), but in between we discover that it was written by someone who had experienced much trouble. Some of this trouble was self-inflicted (v.4), some came from his enemies (v.5-8), and worst of all (v.9): *Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.*

Jesus quoted from these words when he predicted his betrayal and, chillingly, we read that moments later, when Judas Iscariot took the bread from Jesus, Satan entered him (John 13:18,27).

I can't think of a time when anyone close to me has betrayed me, but perhaps you may have been turned against by close friends or even by family members. I can't imagine what that must feel like, but Jesus knows because it happened to him.

Others of us have probably experienced the pain of having pinned our hopes on something which did not deliver what we were hoping for – perhaps because we failed to achieve what we hoped, or because the thing we did achieve turned out not to be as worthwhile as we expected.

In whatever ways we have been betrayed (whether by ourselves, other people, or something else), we can be confident that Jesus understands. And because Jesus has been there too, we can also be confident that he will not disappoint us; if he went through with the cross for us, it is clear he will never betray us.

Prayers

Lord of love, thank you for every marriage and family where love is at the centre. We remember adults and children in relationships badly affected by poverty, conflict, unfaithfulness, neglect or cold-heartedness. Please send the help they need. Amen

(Now add your own prayers of response, before praying as suggested below.)

Pray for all those who seek to speak words of grace, including members of the CBC pastoral care team, community chaplains, volunteers at Foodbank, Changing Lives, and other local organisations.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/zundjUFazfg> (Yet not I but through Christ in me)

To ponder today

Who or what has let you down? Who or what had proved to be faithful? Use Psalm 41 to bring them to the Lord.

Wednesday 28th March

Today's Psalms: 35 and 69

As Jesus prepared his disciples for the time when he would leave them, he said these words (John 15:20,25): *If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you ... This is to fulfil what is written in their Law: "They hated me without reason."*

Jesus was warning his disciples that, like him, they would be hated by other people because they didn't 'fit in'. And the words he quoted are found in Psalms 35 and 69 – both of which are often called 'Psalms of lament', because they are used to express sorrow and dissatisfaction with the way things are.

However, as is common in Psalms of lament, they also contain an element of defiance – they are what I like to call 'Psalms of nevertheless' – they appeal to God to bring help and deliverance, but even if that help and deliverance is not experienced right now, the Psalmist proclaims that he or she will nevertheless keep praising God.

Jesus was preparing his disciples (and us) because, just as he was going through a time of pain, so we also should expect to live through times when our faith and worship seem to defy what is happening to us and how we are feeling.

I'm hurt and in pain; Give me space for healing, and mountain air.

[Nevertheless ...]

Let me shout God's name with a praising song, let me tell his greatness in a prayer of thanks.

(Psalm 69:29-30, *The Message*)

Prayers

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in you, I will be joyful in God my Saviour. Sovereign Lord, you are my strength; you make my feet like the feet of a deer, you enable me to tread on the heights.

(Now add your own prayers of response, before praying as suggested below.)

Pray for our link missionaries, Jane in Mozambique and Judy in Thailand (see bmsworldmission.org/people), and the congregations of Agape and City churches in Tirana.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/Olahc83Kvp4> (Do you feel the world is broken?)

To ponder today

For prayer: How do we see this attitude of 'nevertheless' in Jesus at Easter? How do you see it in the lives of Christians you know? How is it seen in your life?

Thursday 28th March

Today's Psalm: 118 (again)

I've been watching the new homes being built on the corner of Parnell Road and Teignmouth Road. Not long ago there was a big hole in the ground, but now the houses are nearing completion (though it all seems to be taking a long time!)

Imagine if, when the building work is completed, somebody noticed a large concrete beam lying about, which the builders had rejected because they don't think it fitted anywhere. And then, once it was almost too late, everyone sees that this beam should have had a crucial place in the construction. Without it the building will be incomplete and structurally unsound. They may even need to knock it down and begin again.

I'm sure the building inspectors will ensure that doesn't happen in Clevedon, but it's similar to the scenario Jesus borrowed from Psalm 118, to warn people about the consequences of rejecting him. He said: *Haven't you read this passage of Scripture: "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes"?*

Jesus had just been telling a parable about a bunch of people who thought they could push God out of their lives. It may be that we have never consciously decided to do that, but it is easy to allow it to happen gradually – it is easy to build a way of life, or a worldview, or a self-image, which does not have Jesus in the place he belongs.

Prayers

My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly trust in Jesus' name ... Christ alone; cornerstone; weak made strong in the Saviour's love. Through the storm, he is Lord, Lord of all.

(Now add your own prayers of response, before praying as suggested below.)

Pray for the children and youth in our church and beyond, for Josh our youth pastor and Jordan our children's worker, and for all the children who came to Destination Bethlehem. Pray that they will make good friends, and above all that they will know Jesus as their Saviour and Cornerstone.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/X4emGl1gHPA> (Christ be in my waking)

To ponder today

How can you make Jesus the cornerstone of your whole way of living?

Good Friday (29th March)

Today's format is in two parts, one to be used earlier and the other later in the day

Part 1: morning/afternoon

Today's Psalm: 22

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

These words, from the opening of Psalm 22, were shouted by Jesus after he had been hanging on the cross for about six hours. He died shortly afterwards (Mark 15:25, 34, 37).

The previous day, Jesus had addressed God as Abba (Father) and had submitted himself to his will (Mark 14:36). Now that intimacy seems to be absent, but Jesus remains faithful to the work he came to earth to do.

On Good Friday morning, his clothes were taken by the soldiers, who divided them into four shares and then cast lots to see who would get his woven undergarment. John's Gospel points out that this fulfilled another verse from Psalm 22: *They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.*

Psalm 22 is also a 'Psalm of nevertheless'. And I wonder whether, by drawing our attention to the first verse together with a verse from the middle of the Psalm, the Holy Spirit is giving us a hint that we also need to look at the end of the Psalm in order to understand the significance of what happened on Good Friday:

Future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!

Take some time out today to read the whole of Psalm 22 and to reflect on what it must have meant to Jesus on Good Friday.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/6E5Ux9PXjso> (Man of sorrows)

Merciful God, as we relive the events of this day, it is with awe that we count again the cost of our salvation. Words cannot be found to express our thanksgiving. Accept our adoration, in Jesus' name. Amen

(Now add your own prayers of response.)

Part 2: afternoon/evening

Gospel reading: Mark 15

The cross has always been a problem for people – Paul wrote that it was ‘a stumbling block for Jews and foolishness for gentiles’; Muslims find it impossible to accept that Jesus did actually die on the cross; and today’s secularists find the whole concept distasteful. (Would it not have been better for Jesus to have ministered for another 30 years, bringing healing, wisdom and peace, rather than dying?) But the New Testament has an entirely different perspective.

At the heart of the Temple was the Most Holy Place where nobody could go except the High Priest once a year. In front of it was a thick curtain to keep the rest of us out, symbolising God’s holiness. When Jesus died, God tore the curtain from top to bottom (v.38); the sequence of events that started at Jesus’ baptism where God tore the heavens and sent his Spirit on Jesus (Mark 1:10) had reached its climax. Sinners can now approach God because we are put right with him as a result of the cross. The old barriers are gone; the victory is declared by God.

Gentiles (like the centurion in v.39) were seen as furthest away from God and were restricted to the outer courts of the Temple in Jerusalem; slightly further in were women. But it was a centurion who Mark records as the first person to call Jesus the Son of God (until then, only God and demons had understood Jesus’ identity – see Mark 1:11 and 3:11); and women were given special mention and would be the first witnesses to the resurrection. The old barriers are gone; God is reconciling all sorts of people to himself in Christ.

‘Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings.’

(Hebrews 10:19-22)

Prayers

Lord Jesus, you alone are worthy to take the scroll which reveals God’s eternal purposes for judgment and redemption, and to break open its seals. For like a lamb you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God people of every kind, including us. So you are worthy to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise.

(Now add your own prayers of response.)

Video link: <https://youtu.be/vCcGqMHndxo> (*Worthy is the Lamb*)

To ponder

What difference has Jesus’ death meant for me? What would I like to say to him in response?

Saturday 30th March

Today's Psalm: 34

The men who were crucified on either side of Jesus were still clinging on to life as the Sabbath approached, and so the Jewish leaders asked the Romans to break their legs in order to hasten their deaths. But Jesus was already dead, and John 19:36 sees in this a fulfilment of Psalm 34: *Not one of his bones will be broken.*

This is one of those occasions when a New Testament writer appears at first sight to be quoting an Old Testament verse totally out of context, because Psalm 34 is a song that proclaims how God delivers those who trust in him. That hardly seems an appropriate place to look when Jesus has been unjustly killed, does it?

My dad died ten years ago, at Easter. Psalm 34 was his favourite Psalm, and we read it at his funeral. Was it an appropriate Psalm to read at a funeral – given that God didn't appear to deliver my father from suffering and death either?

Yet when John's Gospel draws our attention to Psalm 34, it is not just quoting a random proof text. Rather, as is often the case when the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, we are being invited to re-read the whole Psalm in the light of Jesus.

In Psalm 34, David encourages those who are suffering to remain faithful – to keep trusting in God. He had been through a difficult time himself, and God had delivered him, and so he sings: *Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*

Today we remember Jesus lying in the tomb, dead. And if we did not know how the story ends, we might feel, as his first disciples might have felt, that Psalm 34 was a very inappropriate song to be singing.

But tomorrow changes everything. Because of Easter, we were able to declare with joy at dad's funeral: *The Lord will rescue his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.*

Prayers

Eternal God, go before us to lead our ways from death to life, go with us to keep us in the paths of peace. Deal graciously, with those who mourn, that casting all their care on you, they may know the consolation of your love. Amen

(Now add your own prayers of response, before praying as suggested below.)

Pray for all who walk today through the valley of the shadow of death, including: the bereaved, those living in war zones, and those oppressed by mental illness.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/KlhJLx4Atpl> (*Therefore I know*)

To ponder today

Lay hold of the promises of Psalm 34 for yourself or for someone you know. Which Psalm would you like to be read or sung at your funeral?

Easter Sunday (31st March)

Today's Psalm: 110

Quiz question: Which Old Testament verse does the New Testament refer to most often?

Answer: The first verse of Psalm 110. For example, Jesus quoted it about himself a few days before he died, Peter mentioned it at the end of his sermon at Pentecost, and in Hebrews 1 it is used to emphasise how far superior Jesus is to any created being: *To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'?*

Over the last week our focus has rightly been on Jesus' suffering and death for us. But today changes everything. Today we rejoice: Jesus is risen, and he is Lord!

A few years ago several newspapers reported a survey which supposedly showed that nearly a quarter of Christians in the UK don't believe in the resurrection, but that quite a few non-Christians do believe in it.

So what does it mean to be a Christian? Here is one definition (Romans 10:9):

If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Have you ever openly declared that 'Jesus is Lord'? Is it time you did, perhaps through baptism? Or was it a long time ago, and time you made it a more regular thing?

Prayers

Written prayer: *God of glory, by the raising of your Son you have broken the chains of death and hell: fill your Church with faith and hope; for a new day has dawned and the way to life stands open in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen*

(Now add your own prayers of response, before praying as suggested below.)

Prayer suggestions: *Thank God that one day all of creation, which currently groans in frustration, will be set free from its bondage to decay, and that we will live forever in that renewed creation. Pray that this hope will transform the way we behave towards other people and towards the world in which we live.*

Video link: <https://youtu.be/RoPAyosw4AU> (Happy day)

To ponder today

Spend some time worshipping the risen Lord Jesus today, both privately and with others. Is there someone else you can encourage to worship Jesus today?

Acknowledgements

Prayers on Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday taken from *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* © The Archbishops' Council

Prayer on Monday adapted from opendoorsuk.org

Prayer on Tuesday from care.org.uk

Prayer on Wednesday adapted from Habakkuk 3:17-19

Prayer on Thursday from "Cornerstone" by Hillsong

Prayer on Friday morning adapted from *Gathering for Worship* © The Baptist Union of Great Britain

Prayer on Friday evening adapted from Revelation 5:9-12