

Restore us, O God! We hope.

LENT 6 (PALM SUNDAY)

Scripture

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 26:14-27, 66 or Matthew 21:1-11

Focus statement

Our human society values status, power, wealth, and success. God turns things upside down by becoming one of us, taking the role of a humble servant. In hope, we shout praise that God can deliver us, even while we ask, “Who is this?”

Lenten ritual

On this Sunday, focus on moving the overall atmosphere of the service from the initial joy of Palm Sunday to the somberness of Good Friday that is to come. You may have the children begin the service by waving palm branches. You can also place palm branches in the vase on the table. Regarding the banners, you may remove the colorful strips of fabric (the “banner”) at different points throughout the service. For a more dramatic effect, simply drop the individual fabric at the foot of the banner stand, or remove it completely all at once after the closing benediction. Whatever method is used, by the end of the service, only the bare structure of the banner frame should remain. Ask the congregation to leave in silence.

Song suggestions:

THEME SONG:

STJ 29 You Are All We Have

HWB 69 The Lord Is King

HWB 100 Praise Him, Praise Him

HWB 106 All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name

HWB 237 All Glory, Laud, and Honor

HWB 238 Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

HWB 239 Ride On, Ride On in Majesty

HWB 371 Let There Be Light

STS 73 Jesus Is Coming (Pave the Way with Branches)

STS 75 Heri ni jina /Blessed Be the Name

“Build Your Kingdom Here” by Rend Collective Experiment

“In Christ Alone” by Keith Getty

“Hosanna” by Hillsong United

Call to worship

Leader: Who is this who comes, humble and riding on a donkey?

All: Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Leader: Who is this who comes, free from pride and hubris?

All: Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Leader: Who is this who comes, celebrated by powerless children?

All: Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Leader: Hosanna! Come join in the celebration of hope!

Offering prayer

With all that we have and all that we are, we honor you. Restore us, O God, to live in freedom and trust.

Confession and words of assurance

(adapted from “K.2.2 Prayers of Confession, 6” in The Worship Sourcebook. [Grand Rapids: Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, 2004], 587.)

Leader: Jesus, our Lord, you came to us humbly—riding on a donkey.
In peace, you showed us the way of your kingdom.
We confess that our vision of the kingdom is not pure.
It is stained with our own selfish desires.

**People: We shout hosannas to praise you,
—only out of our need to survive.
We lay down our cloaks and palms to adore you
—only to strip your garment away and humiliate you.**

Leader: Forgive us, O Lord, when our mouths that seek to praise you often deny and defy you.

**People: Renew in us an obedient spirit,
that we may fully accept and follow your will.**
(Pause for silent confession)

Leader: God, our true Hope,

All: restore us.

Leader: Our times are in your hands, O God. Let your face shine upon your servants who pursue your will, and save us in your unfailing love.

Sermon seeds

It can be difficult to know what is needed in a Palm Sunday sermon. Certainly the Scripture passages cover much territory. As the preacher, you will need to discern what kind of emphasis is needed. If your congregation dwells in the Passion Week story with a Maundy Thursday or Good Friday service, you may want to focus on the triumphal entry account in Matthew 21, exploring Jesus’ way of turning upside down the expectations of a king entering the holy city. Or you may discern that the congregation needs to be led into the Good Friday story in order to prepare them for celebrating the risen Christ on Easter.

The servant’s song from Philippians 2 speaks to both approaches. Both the triumphal entry and the crucifixion accounts provoke us to see Jesus as the humble servant who does not “consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage” (Philippians 2:6 NIV). He chooses to be obedient to death, and God exalts him to the highest place. In his ministry, Jesus has offered life and liberation to all. His death is an attempt to silence his work and his followers. (Soon, we will celebrate that his crucifixion was unable to destroy Jesus or his message. The powers of destruction cannot destroy the power of God’s love and purposes.)

Benediction

Option 1 (with focus leading toward Good Friday): May the One who lives, suffers, and dies, not considering equality with God something to be exploited, walk with you, giving you hope even in the midst of sorrow. (*Then, strike the stage/banners.*)

Option 2 (with focus on hope and Palm Sunday): Live in hopeful attention to the One who comes to deliver us. Live in hope. Live in love. (*Then, strike the stage/banners.*)