

Lent Course 2026

Walking Holy Week with the Disciples/What were they thinking?



St Andrew's, Zurich, with Baden, St. Gallen and Zug

The Association of the Anglican Church in Zurich

Session 1: Palm Sunday

Wow, what a day! Everything we hoped for has happened – Jesus is in Jerusalem and everyone is shouting for him, waving palms, strewing the road with their coats. It was fantastic – now we’ll show them what the Messiah can do!

But let me start at the beginning of the day. We’d reached Bethpage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, close to Jerusalem, and we stopped for a rest and a bite to eat. Jesus sent two of us into the next village, and this was a bit strange I admit: he told them that they would find an unriden colt tied up there. They were to untie it and bring it to him. Well, we did wonder about this, but sure enough, shortly afterwards, the two came back with the colt: everything had been just as Jesus had said. Even down to being asked and telling the man: The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately. Well, Jesus was going to ride on this colt, so we put our coats on its back to make it more comfortable – for Jesus and the colt. Jesus got on and we set off.

By now, people were gathering and as they saw Jesus on the colt, they began to cheer, cutting down palm branches and laying them down on the road, together with more coats, and then some went ahead shouting and waving their branches. What a noise: “Hosanna!” they were chanting, “blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” The noise was incredible, it brought everyone out to look at Jesus, at us, as we marched, bold and brass, into Jerusalem. This time Jesus didn’t get embarrassed about people calling him the Son of David, the Messiah. He just rode on into the city. We were all caught up in the excitement, the noise, the joyous hopefulness. At last.

We all expected Jesus to get off the colt and start challenging the authorities, start wielding his power, bolstered by the crowd yelling for him. But, he didn't. He just went into the temple. Had a look around at everything. And left. We all went back to Bethany. Maybe he felt it was too late in the day to do anything. It just felt a little, flat: why didn't he use the crowds, use the popularity, the cheering to do something? Not for the first, or last time no doubt, us disciples were left confused.

Readings and Questions

Read: Mark 11:1-11

Questions:

1. What do you think the disciples made of this event? What would you have thought if you had been there with them?
2. What do you think the crowd wanted or were expecting?
3. How does this relate to your own expectations of Jesus? Our own understanding of who Jesus is? What sort of Jesus do we expect to find? Is this the sort of Jesus we will find?
4. What can we take of this event for our lives, for our faith?

Session 2: Back to Jerusalem

Yesterday started so well – going into Jerusalem, the crowds shouting and singing. And then, instead of marching on the Temple and stirring up the crowd further, Jesus just led us back to Bethany. We left a few of the keener lads muttering and sounding a little unhappy about this about face. And we left the officials, the religious ones, unsettled. I did see some of them gathering in groups at the side. Oh well, lets see what today brings.

Well, today was even more baffling. It didn't even start well. Jesus cursed a fig tree for not having any figs! I mean, it's not even the season for figs so what did he expect? Anyway, we were a little surprised to say the least.

However, that was nothing to what happened next! We went back to Jerusalem, to the temple. I must admit, I was feeling a little nervous about that – well, the chief priests and scribes weren't too happy with our arrival yesterday, and they are not to underestimated. Anyway, we all went to the temple. We thought he wanted to pray and teach, but no, Jesus walked into the courtyard where the traders were selling doves and exchanging Roman coins for temple money, and something just came over him. He got angry, really angry, and started shouting, overturning the tables of the moneychangers and dove-sellers, and driving them out of the building. He turned on them all and said: 'Is it not written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"? But you have made it a den of robbers.' Well, we were really unsettled by this – I mean, he really challenged the Temple authorities with this one. We were terrified that we would all be arrested on the spot – the chief priests and scribes certainly heard what he was saying, and by their faces they wanted to kill him. I think we were only

saved from arrest by the crowd who were listening to Jesus teach, they were spellbound. So the authorities held back, this time, although I must admit we were constantly on edge watching for any sign of an attack, just in case. We were relieved when Jesus led us back out of the city in the evening.

Next day, Peter noticed the fig tree Jesus had cursed in the morning, and it had really withered away, right back to its roots. Peter pointed this out to Jesus who told us to have faith in God. “Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, “Be taken up and thrown into the sea”, and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you.” More confusing words for us – how can a mountain be thrown into the sea! Then he told us that whatever we ask for in prayer, if we believe we have received it, it would be ours. He also told us that when we stand in prayer, we have to forgive anything against anyone, so that our Father God would forgive us.”

Readings and Questions

Read: Mark 11:12-25

Questions:

1. How would you have felt that morning as they set off? Would you have felt about the day before? Would you be looking forward to going back to Jerusalem?
2. What do you think of Jesus' behaviour to the fig tree?
3. What would it have been like to enter the Temple? What do you think the temple courtyard was like?
4. How might the disciples have been feeling as they enter the Temple? How do you think they felt when Jesus started shouting and overturning tables?
5. Why do you think Jesus did this? Do his actions here fit your idea of Jesus?
6. What do you think the chief priests and scribes thought? Why didn't they act? Is it just because of the crowd, or is there more to their actions, of lack of action?
7. Why do you think Jesus leaves the city every evening?
8. What does prayer mean to you? What is Jesus trying to teach them and us?

Session 3: Questions and Challenges

We friends are now getting concerned. I mean, he's really gone and upset the authorities by driving out their income! And today he's heading back to Jerusalem: what on earth will he do today?

Well, we learned what he was going to do – he was on form today, back to his old self of teaching and defeating the challenges put to him by his enemies.

Unsurprisingly, the scribes, chief priests and elders were waiting for him this morning. As soon as he entered the Temple, there they were. They came up to him and asked him “by what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?” Well, I don't really blame them, he had challenged their authority yesterday. Anyway, Jesus knew this was meant to make him say something that they could use against him, so he did his old trick of turning the question back on his interrogators: “I will ask you one question” he said to them, “answer me and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.”

He is certainly not afraid of them, unlike the rest of us! Anyway, he asked them if the baptism of John came from heaven or from human origin. Well, this got them into some heated arguments amongst themselves – well, if they said from heaven they knew he would ask them why they hadn't believed John. And if they said of human origin then the crowds would have got angry with them – they regard John as a true prophet. Well, in the end they gave a very lame answer: “We do not know”. And Jesus told “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” That showed them.

Jesus then told one of his parables about a man planting a vineyard and leasing it to tenants. When the owner sent servants to collect the share from the tenants, they beat them, insulted them, killed them until the owner only had his son to send. So he sent the son, but the tenants killed him hoping to inherit the vineyard. Jesus ended the parable by saying what the owner will do – he'd come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Finishing with Scripture to further explain: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes." Well, the scribes and priests realised he was talking about them and they got really angry, I thought they were going to arrest him there and then. It was only the crowd who were listening to his every word that stopped them. Things are getting tricky.

They kept on trying to catch him out all day. Some of the Pharisees and Herodians tried by asking him about taxes. They were so ingratiating to begin with: "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth." I mean, if they believed that, why do they keep trying to catch him out! Anyway, they asked him a tricky question which we thought might actually manage to catch him out. "Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" He knew this was a trick question, and said so: "Why are you putting me to the test?" he asked them for a denarius, and when they'd given him one, he asked whose head was on it. Obviously, the emperor's. He then told them to give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's. That made them think, and they were left dumbfounded.

Readings and Questions

Read: Mark 11:27-12:17

Questions:

1. Day 3 and they are back in Jerusalem. How do you think the disciples felt returning after the events of the day before?
2. What is important about the question posed by the scribes: by what authority? What were they trying to do here?
3. What about the parable? What is Jesus trying to do here? It would seem that he is deliberately trying to annoy the religious authorities, what do you think?
4. What does Jesus' response to the question on tax mean for us today?
5. How does this feel to the disciples? Do they see anything different here or just Jesus being Jesus and the authorities being the authorities?
6. What might this parable mean for us and our attitudes towards church, faith, Jesus? What would our reaction be if Jesus came today, to us?

Session 4: More Questions

They just can't stop can they. The Sadducees came up this time with a question about resurrection, and whose wife a woman would be if she'd married seven brothers in turn, they had each died with no children born. I mean, convoluted or what! And they quoted Moses at him: "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother." Well, I think Jesus was getting a bit fed up by now. He told these Sadducees, these learned religious types, that they knew neither the scriptures nor God's power. He went on to tell them that after death there is no marriage, but we become like angels. He told them that if they knew Moses' story then they would know that God had told Moses "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is God of the living, not the dead." And he finished by telling them they were quite wrong. Strong stuff.

However, it wasn't all bad. One scribe was impressed by Jesus' teaching and actually asked a good question. "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered this one straight: "the first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."" He went on to say these were the greatest commandments. The scribe was impressed, agreeing with Jesus that these were much more important than burnt-offerings and sacrifices. He must have impressed Jesus because he told him he wasn't far from God's kingdom. It also put a stop to all the questions from the authorities for the time being.

It didn't stop Jesus' questions, though. He questioned the scribes' teaching that the Messiah is the son of David. Jesus pointed out that David had called the Messiah Lord, so how can the Messiah be David's son? This really delighted the crowd. However, he then went further and denounced the scribes: "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at the banquets!" He went on to accuse them of devouring widow's houses and saying long prayers for appearances sake. He then said that these scribes would receive "the greater condemnation". That isn't going to go down well with the scribes. I don't know why he felt the need to say it! It certainly didn't help our feelings of disquiet and growing fear for him, and for us.

But he still hadn't finished. He had finally sat down, opposite the treasury, and was watching everyone making their offerings – lots of very generous gifts, and then this one old woman came and only put two small coins in. I was about to make a comment about how generous everyone else was compared to her, when Jesus called to us and said: "truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing, for all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on." Well, I was speechless. He does see things so very differently to us. And is very good at taking the wind out of one's sails.

Readings and Questions

Read: Mark 12:18-41

Questions:

1. What do you understand by Jesus' response to the question from the Sadducees?
2. How important is the last line: He is God not of the dead, but of the living? What does this mean?
3. What are your thoughts on the two great commandments? What do they mean to us today?
4. How do you think Jesus' comments about the widow's offering were taken by those who heard it? How might it be taken today?
5. Read Chapter 13. What are your thoughts on what Jesus is saying to his disciples and to us today? How can we keep awake?
6. What are we learning about Jesus in these chapters? What are we learning about our faith, our ideas about him?

Session 5: Maundy Thursday to Good Friday.

(We now enter the final few days of Holy Week. There is a lot going on so I will take this in sections. If you would like to, in the time away from the session, reflect on these events, perhaps even writing down your reflection in whatever way suits you best – prose, poetry, diary, notes, etc.)

The Passover preparations have begun – it is the first day of Unleavened bread. Well, we were wondering what our group would be doing to celebrate Passover. We asked Jesus where he would like us to go and make preparations for him to eat the Passover. Jesus' response was, we thought, quite odd. He told two of us to go into the city. There they would be met by a man carrying a jar of water and they should follow him. When they got to where he went in they were to enter and tell the owner: "The teacher asks where the guest room is where he can eat the Passover with his friends." He said that the owner would show them a room ready for them and they should make the preparations for the celebration. We were a little worried, but we shouldn't have been, because our friends found everything just as Jesus had told them! How, we don't know.

At the meal things got even stranger. Jesus said that one of us, one sitting there eating with him, would betray him. We all denied this, and I must say we felt quite upset that he would think this of us. But he said it would happen: one who was dipping in the bowl with him would betray him. We all felt aggrieved and a little cross that he would think that we would betray him, after all we've done.

Well, then things got more confusing. Jesus took a piece of bread, blessed it, broke it and shared it with us, saying: "Take; this is my body." Then he picked up a cup of wine, blessed it and then handed it round to us all, saying: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." We were all unsettled by his words and behaviour. But then he said he wouldn't drink wine again until he drank it in God's kingdom. We didn't know what to think, or say.

But he didn't stop there, on top of saying one of us would betray him, he then said we'd all desert him. Peter immediately stood up and declared that even if all the rest of us deserted him, he would never do that. Jesus quietly told him that he would deny him three times that very night. Peter, upset by now, denied that. As did all the rest of us.

After the meal we were all feeling confused and concerned about Jesus' words. He led us out to Gethsemane, where he left most of us, except Peter, James and John, and went further on to pray. It sounded intense. He seemed afraid, or rather, upset. We couldn't stay awake, even Peter, James and John. Suddenly, he seemed to change, he commanded us to stand up because he was about to be betrayed. And sure enough, there was a crowd with clubs and swords surrounding us. Judas, one of us, walked up to Jesus and kissed him. And the soldiers grabbed him. One of us, I didn't see who, cut the high priest's slave's ear off. Jesus just stood, bound, and asked them quietly why they had come against him with weapons. "But let the scriptures be fulfilled." I'm sorry, we ran. We were terrified. Would we be taken too.

Readings and Questions

Read: Mark 14:12-51

And so we enter the courts and the judgements. Jesus is taken before the Council and the religious leaders try to drum up charges against him. They had decided he should be put to death and looked for reasons.

Peter, sitting outside, denies him three times: “I do not know this man you are talking about.” He remembers Jesus’ words, breaks down and cries.

And they lead him to Pilate. Jesus does not defend himself. Pilate is amazed. After offering up Barabbas or Jesus to be released, Pilate is forced to release Barabbas and condemn Jesus to death.

Read: Mark:15:21-41

Questions:

1. How much do you think the disciples were aware of what might happen that night?
2. What strikes you about the meal most? Why?
3. Why couldn't Jesus tell them what was to happen? Or had he already?
4. What would you have done?
5. What of the trials and denial by Peter strike you most?
6. Thoughts on the crucifixion.
7. Why? Why what has my Lord done? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Is the crucifixion important on its own or just as a precursor to the resurrection?

