



Week One

Jerusalem: Risking Reputation

Open the Gathering with Prayer ~ Choose your own or read Psalm 118 responsively.

Gathering Prompt – *choose one invitation to start connecting with each other and the week's themes.*

- Take a moment to remember a parade that you've seen. Tell others in the group about that parade. What made it memorable?
- Find an object or image that makes you think of Lent. Share it with the group. Why does this object or image make you think of Lent?

Overview – *a short summary of the chapter to remind participants of the main themes.*

Story ~ Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey and the crowd put items on the road and shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

Political Context ~ Jerusalem was a holy city to the Jewish people, but it was occupied by the Romans. Pontius Pilate, Governor of Judea, was also arriving with troops as a show of power in Jerusalem.

Scriptural Precedent ~ Zechariah made many predictions about a messianic age to come when God's rule would be manifest on earth. Matthew quotes Zechariah's prophecy that a king, a son of David, would come humbly on a donkey. When Jesus arranges for a donkey to take him into Jerusalem, he is proclaiming that he is the messiah, coming not for political office but for justice, compassion and peace.

Significance ~ "Hosanna" is a Hebrew term that means "save us please." This story raises the questions: What are we being saved from? What are we being saved for? Many in the crowd that day expected to be saved from Roman rule. Yet, the triumphal arrival into Jerusalem led to the cross. How prepared are we to follow a meek king, "who offers a different path to victory than that of the typical conquering hero?" (37). What are the challenges, disappointments and implications for Christian living of the "different path"? How do we shift our perceptions of God in light of the "different path" and our own practices as we follow on the "different path"?

Inquiry – *initial questions, thoughts, new ideas arising out of the reading.*

- What details about the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem that Levine unpacks in this chapter were new or interesting to you?
- How have these details enriched, shaped or challenged your understanding of this story?
- Do these new details have any implications for your understanding or practice of faith?

Scripture – *re-read a key scripture passage together.*

Read **Matthew 21:1–11** (NRSV) – the translation Levine uses in the book (p. 21).

AND

Read the passage again using a different translation of your choice.

- The New Testament was written in Greek, so all translations are slightly different based on the translator's choice of wording. Differences in translations allow readers to hear the text in fresh ways and engage with the nuances of interpretation that come with reading a sacred text that was originally written in another language.

Discussion – *questions related to the scripture passage.*

Levine reminds us that the way that Jesus enters Jerusalem is based on Zechariah's prophecies. Read Zechariah 9:9–12. Underline the adjectives that are used to describe the coming saviour. What do the choice of adjectives reveal, do you think? Circle the verbs used to describe the saviour's action? How does this passage shed light on Matthew's depiction of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem?

Levine writes, "The whole Triumphal Entry scene is one of anticipation, but it cannot be read alone. The parade into Jerusalem, with all its hype and hope, leads directly to the cross" (36). What hints are there in this story that this is the beginning of Jesus' journey to the cross? Why is it important to read this story in the context of the whole passion narrative?

Living Practices – *practices connected to the theme for participants to engage in between sessions.*

"During Lent you have the opportunity to think about your life alongside the life of Jesus, inviting inward transformation and then outward action" (Levine, p. 13).

Humility ~ Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem was a victory parade that celebrated humility over power. While it is exciting to be a follower of Jesus during the hopefulness and hype of moments like the one in this story, it can be harder to align ourselves with a humble saviour during the darkness and doubt of moments like the ones experienced at the cross.

- Think of some people you know who are humble. What do you admire about them? How is humility a gift in your own life and the life of the communities to which you belong? Spend some time in prayer asking God to grow qualities of humility in you.

- As we've learned, "Hosanna" means "Save us." This plea acknowledges that we do not have the power to save ourselves; we need Jesus. Write out what we collectively need saving from and what you personally need saving from. Turn your list into a prayer by speaking to God about the things listed. How is God calling you to respond or act in some way?

Close the Gathering with Prayer ~ *Choose your own or say the Lord's prayer together.*

