

Journey to the Final Week
Lenten Scripture Study and Reflection
St. Matthew's Church

Adapted from *The Final Week* by John Birch

March 7 *The Journey to Jerusalem*

Opening Prayer:

Be with us as we join Jesus and his disciples as they head toward Jerusalem. Be in our discussion and prayer, and in our own journeys of faith in this season of Lent.

Amen

Please read:

The Entry into Jerusalem

Luke 19:28-34

Approaching Jerusalem

Luke 19:35-40

The Lament for Jerusalem

Luke 19:41-44

Notes:

Place of Prayer

The Mount of Olives was first known as a place of prayer. King David ascended to the Mount of Olives, barefoot, in prayer, while attempting to escape the rage of his son Absalom. Those in his company also wept (1 Samuel 15:30).

The prophets Zechariah and Ezekiel prophesied from here future judgement on Israel, as well as the future restoration and the regathering of the exiles. Additionally, Zechariah describes the Mount of Olives as the exact place where the Messiah would return (Zechariah 14:4).

Jesus Praying on the Mount of Olives

Jesus prayed on the Mount of Olives on the day before the crucifixion – in the Garden of Gethsemane.

It was there that an angel comforted Him. During Jesus' life, as He ministered to the multitudes, He would often retreat to pray on the Mount as well (Luke 21:37, Luke 22:39).

In the week leading up to the Cross, Jesus visited the Mount of Olives three times. In the first instance, He came down Mount of Olives and entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as foretold by Zechariah the Prophet.

The second time He could be found in the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples. He was explaining to them the days to come. Finally, He visited Mount of Olives one last time that week, on the night He was betrayed.

Reflection Questions:

1) Mount of Olives was a sacred place of prayer in the Old & New Testaments.

Reflection: where are your sacred places of prayer?

2) What is the context for Jesus entering Jerusalem?

3) Verse 31: "And if anyone should ask you, 'Why are you untying it?' you will answer, 'The Master has need of it.'" What does, "The Master has need of it" imply?

4) What is the significance of the donkey?

- Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem from Jericho, a wealthy and important town where a forest of palms and balsam groves added fragrance to the atmosphere of the area. It was known as The City of Palms. The journey to Jerusalem was seventeen miles, and not an easy one, being mainly uphill from a town 250m below sea level to one a thousand meters higher. It would be hot, dry and dusty. This was the route of the pilgrims and towards the end of the journey beyond Bethany, Bethphage and the Mount of Olives, the glistening and holy city of Jerusalem would come into view. So Jesus, mounted on a donkey and accompanied by his close disciples and others from the wider group of followers made their way toward Jerusalem, and as they passed the Mount of Olives the whole crowd got into the mood, picking up the royal theme by spreading their cloaks along the road for Jesus, and singing the psalm traditionally sung by pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem (Psalm 118), a hymn of praise to a God who defeats the enemy and establishes his kingdom. 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you. The LORD is

God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar.' (Psalm 118:26,27) It's a psalm that Jesus would later quote from in his teaching and discussions in the temple. Jesus approached Jerusalem as the fulfilment of the nation's hopes, the answer to the prayers of generations for a king who would finally bring heaven's peace upon earth. Yet among the crowds welcoming Jesus there were doubters and potential enemies, Pharisees grumbling about the carnival atmosphere, concerned the authorities would consider it an unwanted messianic demonstration.

5) Verse 38: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." What is the connection between this event and using these words in the Eucharistic Prayer?

6) Verse 40: What does it mean to say that the *stones* will cry out?

- Soon the beauty that was Jerusalem would be gone. Even as Jesus and his disciples were approaching the city political maneuverings by the Jewish authorities would turn into tragedy in AD 70 when, following a rebellion against the Romans the city walls were breached, the Temple ransacked, and both set on fire. Thousands were slaughtered, sent to work in Egyptian mines or used for the amusement of the crowds in the Roman arenas. The rebellion was finally ended in AD 73. They had resisted his teaching and could not accept the message of God's grace reaching out beyond their small world to the Gentiles beyond. Jesus had warned of the judgement that would come upon them for resisting his call and, full of emotion, he warns them again - not out of resentment or anger but with a heavy heart and love, for a people who had chosen to follow their own agendas rather than that of God

7) Verses 41-44 Jesus was moved to tears because of the state of humanity in Jerusalem and the world and what was to happen in the year 70 A.D. How does this cause you to reflect on the current state of the world?

8) 'Why does God allow disasters?' What are the problems in trying to give a satisfactory response to this timeless question?

9) How do you encounter people who do not practice through a Christian faith?

What are some of your reflections or questions from this session's passages?

Prayers for the Week

Through the coming week remember all those who on their own journeys have difficult decisions to make, praying that they might hear Gods prompting and feel his guiding hand in their lives.

Pray for refugees making their way from conflict and hardship, hoping to find freedom and somewhere to call home.

Quotes to Ponder

'I imagine Lent for you and for me as a great departure from the greedy, anxious *anti-neighborliness* of our economy, a great departure from our exclusionary politics that fears the other, a great departure from self-indulgent consumerism that devours creation. And then an arrival in a new neighborhood, because it is a gift to be simple, it is a gift to be free; it is a gift to come down where we ought to be.'

(Walter Brueggemann, *A Way Other Than Our Own: Devotions for Lent*)

'No act of virtue can be great if it is not followed by advantage for others. So, no matter how much time you spend fasting, no matter how much you sleep on a hard floor and eat ashes and sigh continually, if you do no good to others, you do nothing great.'

(John Chrysostom)