



# EASTER

*at Oak Hills Church*

On Palm Sunday we recall Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem to shouts of "*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" (Matthew 21:9 NIV). A week later, on Easter Sunday, we gather again to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. These are meaningful observances, and yet there is so much more to the story.

This year we invite you to experience Holy Week through reflection on the events that transpired over the course of those eight days. When Easter Sunday arrives, you will have a deeper appreciation of God's love, and renewed vigor to pursue life to its fullest in Jesus.

# SUNDAY

## THE MESSIAH

### READ

[+ Mark 11:1-10 NIV](#)

### CONSIDER

Jesus visited Jerusalem on many occasions, but this visit was different than the others. This one came with shouts of “Hosanna,” resounding from the hearts of people who knew the prophecy well: *“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”* (Zechariah 9:9 NIV). Jesus knew the prophecy, too, and understood that the people were anticipating certain signs that would identify him as the Messiah. They believed he was their promised deliverer who would lead them to conquer their enemies and free them from the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire.

The people had a narrow notion of the Messiah. God’s was grander. Their hope was centered on themselves and their present circumstances. God’s redemptive plan was far more encompassing, for all people, in all circumstances. Their shouts of praise were truly fit for a king, but could they comprehend Jesus as the King of kings, Lord of lords, ruler of all, come to conquer sin and death?

### REFLECT

In what ways is your notion of Jesus too narrow?

Consider the might and greatness of the Lord. Express your own “hosannas” to the Lord, showing adoration, praise, and joy.

### PRAY

Lord Jesus, you are mighty and great beyond measure. Thank you for being a part of my life, for all that you are, and for all that you do. I confess that I cannot fully comprehend the breadth of your love. Help me to broaden my view of you, and my appreciation of you. You’ve given me the gift of this day. I give it back to you, trusting you to guide me through it. Amen.

# MONDAY

## THE TEMPLE

### READ

[+ 2 Chronicles 7:11-16 NIV](#)

[+ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NIV](#)

[+ Mark 11:15-18 NIV](#)

### CONSIDER

The season of Passover brought Jews to Jerusalem from regions throughout Israel and beyond. Worshippers made their way to the temple to pray, offer sacrifices, and leave offerings. Clever merchants and money changers, recognizing the opportunity to make a profit, positioned themselves within the temple courtyards to sell animals for sacrificing and exchange goods for coin. They provided convenience to the people and their presence had become readily accepted. The people didn’t seem to understand that reverence for God’s temple was being diminished, by seller and worshipper alike.

Jesus doesn’t speak the words here, but they echo through his impassioned actions. We are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength, and we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Anything that taints or takes away from these must be dealt with decisively.

### REFLECT

What is the value of maintaining a sacred space for God in our lives? Do you recognize your body as a temple to the Lord? What have you allowed into your life - what has become normal and accepted - that Jesus would cast out?

Talk to God about what resonates with you from these readings and reflections. Where in your life can you intentionally preserve a place for God? Seek God’s guidance and strength to do so.

### PRAY

Gracious God, my days feel rich in busyness, yet lacking in wholeness. I know that I need you in my life. Show me the aspects of myself that I’ve yet to open to you. Reveal to me, too, those things that I’ve allowed into my life that dishonor you, and give me the strength to deal with them. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

# TUESDAY

## THE TEACHER

### READ

[+ Luke 20:1-26 NIV](#)

### CONSIDER

The Pharisees and Sadducees had been keeping a close eye on Jesus, looking for ways to discredit him. They'd questioned him often in an effort to discern his motives. More and more they came to view him as a threat to their authority. Since arriving in Jerusalem, Jesus had simultaneously stirred the hopes of the people and drawn the attention of the Roman officials. If this continued, the Jewish leaders were concerned that they'd lose their influence or, worse yet, their lives if Roman rule were to tighten further. Their questioning of Jesus increased as they sought ways to diminish his credibility in the sight of the people and regain their control.

In John's gospel it's noted of Jesus, "*He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.*" (John 1:10-11 NIV). It would seem fair to expect the Pharisees and Sadducees, those who were experts in Jewish law and teachings, to be best equipped to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. When faced with truth they were challenged to look intently into their own lives, beliefs, and practices, they pushed back. Rather than accept Jesus' authority they sought to destroy his credibility in order to preserve their own.

### REFLECT:

Contemplate your life, beliefs and practices. In what ways have you dismissed sin or justified behavior that does not align with the teachings of Jesus?

Ask Jesus to reveal aspects of your life that do not reflect his ways. Ask him to help you to align your life with his.

### PRAY

Jesus, I come to you today confessing that your thoughts are not yet my thoughts, and your ways not yet my own. Help me to see those areas of my life that do not honor you, and give me the courage and the strength to let them go. I trust in you, now and always. Amen.

# WEDNESDAY

## THE BETRAYED

### READ

[+ Matthew 20:17-19 NIV](#)

[+ Luke 22:1-6 NIV](#)

### CONSIDER

Jesus knew betrayal was coming, and could name his betrayer. He'd selected Judas to be among the twelve disciples and poured himself into teaching and revealing God's love to Judas just as he'd done with the others. So, what prompted Judas to hand Jesus over? Was he hoping to spur Jesus to be the conquering Messiah whom so many were anticipating? Was his decision based on selfish gain? Had he been consumed by evil? His intent is unknown. That Judas could betray Jesus shouldn't necessarily surprise us. There exists within each of us the potential to speak and act in ways that go against our Lord.

At this mid-way point in Holy Week, the momentum of events leading to the cross begins to quicken. This is an opportune time for us to slow the pace in our spirits and pause to truly reflect on Jesus' role and influence in our own lives.

### REFLECT

What first drew you into a relationship with Jesus? What hopes fuel your faith? What, if anything, is holding you back from aligning your dreams with his, and genuinely accepting Jesus as Lord of your life?

Ask God to reveal to you occasions when your thoughts or actions have betrayed him. Expectantly ask God to renew your passion for following Jesus, and to grant you an enduring faith.

### PRAY

Lord, I have sinned against you. I know I have. Forgive me, please. I want to be more like you. Holy Spirit, guide me, show me a better way and help me to follow. My life is yours. Amen.



# THURSDAY

## THE SERVANT

### READ

[+ John 13:1-15 NIV](#)

### CONSIDER

In this unexpected act of foot washing, Jesus was communicating something profound about the nature of divine love. Love is not simply what Jesus does. Love is who he is. Without an understanding of our gospel-transformed identity we can unknowingly place limits on our love.

When we look to Christ we find a beautiful freedom to serve others arising from the security of his identity:

*“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”* (Philippians 2:6-7 NIV). Jesus was able to serve in a way that no one expected because he knew the Father’s love intimately. The same heart that led him to wash the disciples’ feet would lead him to the cross. By the power of God’s grace, we enjoy full access to the Father through faith in Jesus, and so we become free to serve in the radical, loving ways in which he has served us.

### REFLECT

How will embracing your identity as a child of God change your ability to love others?

Confess the shortcomings of your love. Ask God to root you so deeply in his love that you are freed to love as Jesus did.

### PRAY

Heavenly Father, I forget each day who I am in Christ and the grace that envelops my life. My love has limits because I don’t embrace the truth of who you have made me to be. Help me to live out the reality of being your beloved child so that my love for others flows out of this new identity. Let me be a bewildering servant to those around me as you dismantle the limits I have placed on my love. In Christ’s name, Amen.

# FRIDAY

## THE KING

### READ

[+ Mark 15:1-47 NIV](#)

### CONSIDER

As Thursday night progressed and rolled into Friday morning, Jesus was arrested, beaten, and put on trial for crimes he didn’t commit. He witnessed Peter’s denial. He was stripped, beaten more, whipped brutally, given a crown of thorns, and forced to march with his cross to the place of his death. There, his hands and feet would be nailed to his cross, and he would slowly suffocate to death over several hours. As the crowd mocked and jeered, Jesus did not waiver in his commitment to our redemption. He knew what they didn’t, that saving himself would mean the loss of salvation for all mankind. As he hung in agony he prayed for his crucifiers, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”* (Luke 23:34 NIV). His outward broken body was only a picture of his broken heart. As darkness covered the sky in midday Jesus became the cursed (Galatians 3:13) and became sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) so that we could become righteous. We must see that his death cost God dearly, and therefore that God loves us more than we can imagine.

### REFLECT

What gave Jesus the ability to endure the pain and cruelty of the cross? How does the suffering of Jesus on the cross influence our ability to endure abuse and mistreatment?

Express your desperate need for God’s grace, followed by your appreciation for the gift of his Son.

### PRAY

Good Father, I confess that I am in need of your salvation. I am flawed, broken and guilty. I am deserving of a criminal’s punishment, not of your love. But in your infinite grace you sent Jesus to the cross in my place, to take on my sin and condemnation so that I would not have to. He suffered and died so that I may know you. He was humiliated, beaten, and killed to pay the debt I owe. I will never fully understand your love for me but Lord, I will always be grateful. I am free because of your self-sacrificing love. Amen.

# SATURDAY

## THE REDEEMER

### READ

[+ Isaiah 55:8-9 NIV](#)  
[+ Galatians 4:4-5 NIV](#)

[+ Colossians 1:19-22 NIV](#)  
[+ 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 NIV](#)

### CONSIDER

After the horror of the crucifixion on Friday, the events of Holy Week fall eerily quiet on Saturday. Imagine for a moment what the followers of Jesus were thinking and feeling. They were grieving the death of their teacher and friend, afraid of what would happen next, and uncertain about what life would hold for them from this point forward. The reality is that following Jesus was, and is, truly a journey of faith for his disciples. The original twelve never knew where they were headed or what lay in store for them next. Simply consider the events from Thursday as evidence of the faith involved in following Jesus. The disciples were mystified at the Passover dinner as Jesus washed their feet, foretold Judas' betrayal, and predicted Peter's denial. Over supper the disciples were perplexed by his teaching that he was going to prepare a place for them in his father's house. They were baffled when he said that he and the Father are one. They couldn't understand his promise that once he had gone, an Advocate would come to them.

When we are mystified, confused, baffled, and dumbfounded, we can have peace. He has overcome the world! (John 16:33). We cannot always expect to understand God's timing, or the things he allows. He sees what we cannot. He knows what we do not.

### REFLECT

Recall a time when God felt distant or absent. What were you thinking, feeling, and doing during that time? The next time God seems absent, how can you have peace, and hope and trust in God?

Confess your doubts and disappointments to God. Ask him to give you eyes to see his work, and faith to trust his plans.

### PRAY

Good Father, help me to trust your plans above my own understanding. You are faithful, powerful, and good. I trust you above my own thoughts and ideas. You are more reliable than my feelings or thoughts. Increase my faith when I'm tempted to doubt your power or your goodness. Amen.

# SUNDAY

## THE RISEN

### READ

[+ Luke 24:1-12 NIV](#)

[+ Romans 6:5-7 NIV](#)

### CONSIDER

HE IS RISEN! Jesus is alive! Death is defeated, and sin no longer has the power to enslave us. No one saw this coming. Even though he had distinctly predicted his death and resurrection, his followers couldn't wrap their minds around the miracle of the resurrection. The divine power that raised Jesus from the dead was so shocking and improbable that even the disciples struggled to believe it.

Jesus's rising to everlasting life secured our freedom from sin. Our old selves died with him and our new selves cannot be constrained by sin or death. We can conquer sin in our lives now, and we will live with him forever.

### REFLECT

Recall a time when it was hard to trust God's power to do the improbable in your life? Remembering the power of our risen Lord, what in your life can you believe he will heal, restore, and redeem? What does it mean that we are united to Jesus in his death? How does Jesus' victory over sin and death result in us being freed from sin and death?

Speak to each member of the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit – celebrating God's love. Marvel at the miracle of the resurrection and verbalize your dependence on the indwelling Holy Spirit.

### PRAY

Father, thank you for sending your beloved Son to suffer in my place and deliver me from the grip of the grave. Thank you, Jesus, for taking the penalty for my sins. The beauty of your sacrificial love has arrested my heart. I worship you – the risen Savior. Holy Spirit, help me not forget that your same power that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in me today and every day. Amen.