

A Litany for Palm & Passion Sunday  
Based on Matthew 21 and Matthew 26

*Sacred Story and Reflection*

Reader 1

**Arrival in Jerusalem:**

It all started with an arrival in Jerusalem,  
not a big one, not the Roman legions  
with all their armor and finery entering the city  
to guard the government buildings close to the Temple  
during the celebration of the Passover...

...but a small one on the other side of town,  
of devoted followers of the Rabbi and teacher, Jesus.  
People laid down palm branches;  
they laid down their coats to show how much he meant to them.

"Hosanna to the Son of David!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

It was a time of excitement and celebration – for awhile.

Reader 2

**Reflection on Arrival:**

I remember a man who had dreams of what might be:  
that people would be set free  
from ideas and images about God that enslaved them,  
that people would know through their everyday acts of human kindness  
they are intimately connected with the sacred,  
that people would live in peace,  
in God's presence all the days of their lives.

I remember a man driven by his dreams.

We, too, have had dreams of a better world and wanted to be a part of it.  
We have wanted to make a difference, and still do.

\*Hymn

*Hosanna, Loud Hosanna*

UMH 278

### Reader 3

#### **Betrayal:**

The disciples came to Jesus, saying,  
"Where shall we make preparations for the Passover?"  
He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him,  
"The Teacher says, 'My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house  
with my disciples.'" So the disciples prepared the Passover meal.

Then one of the twelve, one of the disciples,  
whose name was Judas Iscariot,  
went to the chief priests and said,  
"What will you give me if I betray him to you?"  
They paid Judas thirty pieces of silver.  
And from that moment, he began to look for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

When it was evening, Jesus took his place with the twelve;  
and while they were eating he said,  
"Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

And they become greatly distressed  
and began to say to him one after another,  
"Surely not I, Lord?"

### Reader 4

#### **Reflection on Betrayal:**

I remember a man who had his moments of breakthrough,  
when it must have seemed his dream was being realized:

People really listened and responded,  
men and women who were prepared to walk with him and support him.  
People were catching on to his vision.

I remember a man who learned of the cruel death of his cousin John  
not all that long before.  
He got into a boat, seeking a lonely place,  
where he could be with his friends  
to absorb the shock, to grieve quietly,  
and to calm the feelings  
of powerlessness and frustration  
and fear for his own future.

I wonder what helped him leave that lonely place  
and go forward to confront life,  
rather than retreat into isolation and safety –  
like many of us would.

We too, have had to grieve loss,  
and we have had to set our face forward to live our lives.

I remember a man of sincerity and courage and uncommon depth.

The character of Judas is like the betrayers  
in the early stories of Old Testament.  
He may be a literary figure who represents the betrayer  
who sometimes appears in our lives.

Jesus was threatening to those  
who benefited from the business of religion,  
the economy of the temple,  
the system of sacrifice.  
Religion and the state had it all worked out,  
at least those in power.

This man who could heal with his hands and his words  
and talked about another kind of kingdom  
could be nothing but trouble.

He blessed just too many people  
like you and me.

\*Hymn

*What Wondrous Love Is This* vs. 1,2

UMH 292

Reader 5

### **The Meal - the First Lord's Supper**

While they were celebrating the Passover,  
Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it,  
gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks  
he gave it to them, saying,  
"Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant,  
which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine  
until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."  
When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

## Reader 6

### **Reflection on the Meal – the First Lord's Supper**

The body and the blood don't have the same meaning to us.  
Many of the religious people really thought an angry God  
was appeased by blood sacrifice -  
all those animals slaughtered in the temple.

And, Jesus knew that his own blood would be spilt  
unless he caved in with his convictions.

Perhaps he saw himself as the sacrifice -  
and certainly the church that came to be after his death saw it that way.

The system had to be challenged.  
The very understanding of God was captured by people and systems of power  
as if you could hold God captive in a temple.  
Times were tense.  
Surely the kingdom of heaven would arrive soon.

The body represented what it often takes  
to bring about real change in the world.

Look around at the bodies strewn across the lands,  
left on the ground in the pursuit of freedom.  
How long will lives have to be given  
before humans learn to live in peace?

When we speak of the body and blood,  
when we "do this in remembrance" of him,  
we lift up his vision of life  
and his hope – for us – even now.

And we vow to live lives that bring more good into the world.

Reader 7

**In the Garden**

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane;  
and he said to his disciples,  
"Sit here while I go over there and pray."  
He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee,  
and began to be grieved and agitated.  
...And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed,  
"My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me."

Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping;  
and he said to Peter,  
"So could you not stay awake with me one hour?  
Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial;  
the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak."

Again he went away for the second time and prayed,  
"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, you will be done."

Again he came and found them sleeping,  
for their eyes were heavy.

Reader 8

**Reflection on the Garden**

I remember a man whose dream was shattered:  
who broke down and cried over what could have been,  
who knew the pain of failure and powerlessness,  
who knew what it was like to feel broken and terribly alone.

I remember someone human like all of us,  
someone who wished his friends had been there for him,  
who wished they could have stayed awake.

Most of all, he wanted them to remember and to keep his dream alive.  
We too have dreams and want to keep them alive.

We too, want to keep his alive.

\*Hymn

*Were You There?*

UMH 288

Congregation sings verses 1,3, and 5. Soloists sing verses 2,5

Reader 9

### **Arrest and Death**

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived;  
with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs,  
from the chief priests and the elders of the people.  
Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying,  
"The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him."

After a trial - where no one really wanted to take responsibility, he was crucified.

Reader 10

### **Reflection on Arrest and Death**

I remember a man crucified. He was considered a failure,  
abandoned by his male friends, taunted, despised,  
enduring a shameful and agonizing death,  
no consoling or heartfelt presence of his God to help him.

I remember a man whose faith was tested to the limits.

He was not a victim of a vengeful God  
who would kill his children,  
whether for sacrifice or jealousy.

Abraham learned that a long time ago.  
Herod killed his sons because he was jealous.  
Surely humanity has moved beyond that.

Jesus taught love by doing love.

Sometimes we say, "He died for us."  
Sometimes we say, "He died because of us."

Our lives make a difference, every one of them.  
We don't ever want to forget.  
Faith is the willingness to live  
knowing there is more to this life than we can see.

I remember a man of extraordinary religious insight:  
utterly convinced of the connectedness  
between human loving and living in God,  
determined to give people personal authority  
in their relationship with God,  
wanting to set people free from fear of the unknown,  
setting his heart on breaking down barriers between people.

Extraordinary insight  
without the centuries of discovery that divide his life and ours

His vision is worth living every day.

He encourages us to celebrate life,  
to explore, and probe, to venture into uncharted seas,  
without fear of a tyrannical and vindictive God.

We are drawn by him to care courageously,  
to love deeply, and live fully and freely.

Joy comes out of sadness.  
We will have Easter because of him.

\*Hymn

*O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*

UMH 286