



STORIES **AND** RITUALS

LESSON 27

Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

Text copyright © 2014-2015 by the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

Writers

Lindsay Barrett-Adler
Jan Berry Schroeder
The Rev. Sarah Hedgis
Victoria Hoppes
Andrew Kellner
Andrew Kuhn

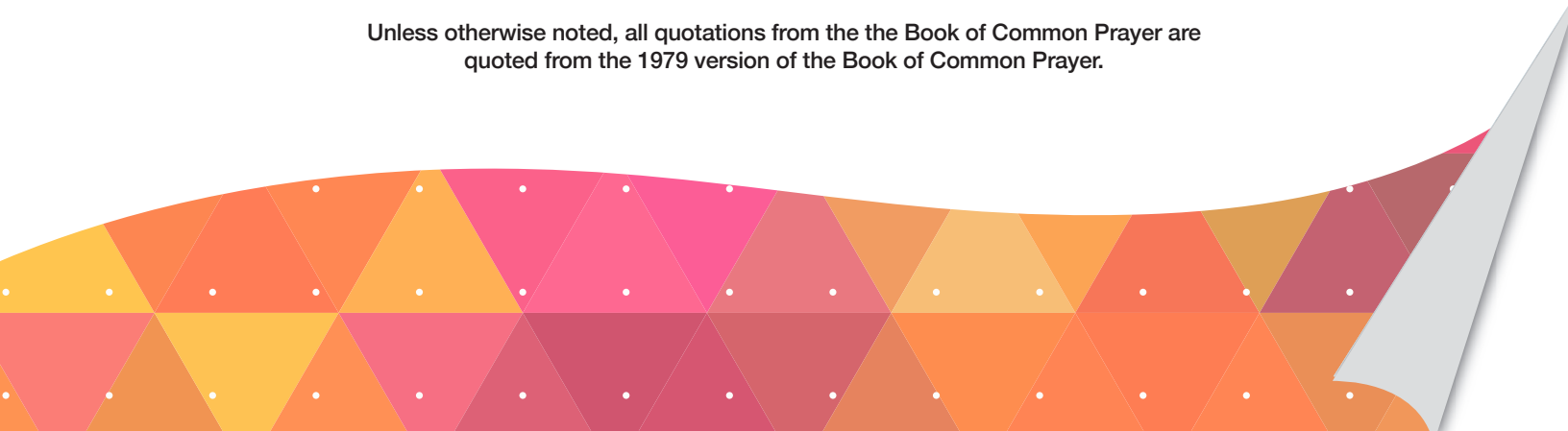
Editor

Victoria Hoppes

All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce this resource for parish use only. No part of this curriculum may be reproduced in any other manner without written permission from the publisher. For permission information, contact the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania at www.diopayouth.org.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the the Book of Common Prayer are quoted from the 1979 version of the Book of Common Prayer.



Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem

Texts: Matthew 21:1-11

Big Idea: We worship God in beauty and holiness.

Lesson Objectives

Participants will:

1. Illustrate showing celebration and welcome by completing a community builder activity.
2. Identify how characters in the story use their gifts to celebrate Jesus through a re-telling of the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.
3. Recognize the gifts they each have to offer to God and their community by creating a palm branch and creating a processional together.

ACTIVITY (TIME)

Dive In (10 minutes)
Group Check-In

Community Builder (15 minutes)
Red Carpet Treatment

The Story (15 minutes)
Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem

The Ritual (15 minutes)
Offering Our Gifts to God

Dig Deeper (10 minutes)
Paving the Way

Wrap it Up (5 minutes)
Closing Prayer

MATERIALS NEEDED

• Nothing

- Long banner or piece of butcher paper
- Red construction paper (1-2 sheets per person)
- Markers
- Tape or glue

• Copy of Lesson Sheet 27.1

- Well-known hymn or service music (optional)
- Method for playing music (optional)
- Green construction paper (1 piece per person)
- Tape or glue
- Markers
- Scissors
- Chenille sticks

- Palms
- Markers

• Nothing

LESSON OVERVIEW



What's the Story?

Today's story is found in Matthew 21:1-11. This is the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. We remember and celebrate this part of the gospel story every year on Palm Sunday. Many congregations participate in a processional into the church, singing hymns and waving palms. They're recreating the scene that Matthew describes here. All four of the gospels share the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem. In each gospel, this is a moment of celebration, when people recognize Jesus as someone playing a special role in God's plan for God's people.

Matthew wrote this gospel during the 1st century CE, when Jews and Gentiles were trying to make sense of their identity as Christ-followers. In this context, Matthew spends a lot of time showing how Jesus as the Messiah is not a break from the Jewish tradition. He shows how Jesus' teachings and miracles connect with the Hebrew Scriptures, especially those describing the messiah. In Zechariah 9:9, the prophet describes a messianic king entering on a donkey or on a colt. Matthew wants so badly for us to understand that Jesus is the messiah of the Old Testament prophecy, that he goes so far as to say Jesus rode in on both a donkey and a colt!

Today's story reminds us of the deep hope and excitement involved in the ways God is present and working in our world. It reminds us that we want to be a part of it—helping find a way for God to enter into our world, worshipping God, and offering our gifts to God and our community. This story also marks Jesus' upcoming arrest, trial, and crucifixion. As Christians, we take in and experience the celebrations and devastations of Jesus' upcoming passion, remembering that he remains consistent throughout it all.



What's the "Big Idea?"

Today's lesson focuses on the idea that *we worship God in beauty and holiness*. Sometimes we think worshipping God like this means participating in big, fancy church services. However, what makes our worship beautiful and holy is the desire we bring to it. The people welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem used what was around them – clothes and branches – and Jesus rode in on a humble donkey. The beauty and holiness of this scene lies in the people's hearts: they have a heart for worshipping God. That is the most beautiful and holy worship we can offer God, both then and today. This story reminds us of what authentic, heartfelt worship can look like no matter who or where you are.



What's the Symbol?

Palms are an old and sacred symbol of the Church during Holy Week. They are also a living symbol: they're living as a plant that grows and drinks water, but also they "come to life" through the people who hold, wave, and cheer with them. The palm is a symbol of our offering to God, just like the people who welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem. Yet, the palm is also a symbol of our hope in God; the same hope the people in Jerusalem had when they yelled, "Hosanna in the highest!" The hope that God is with us.



What's the Ritual?

The ritual of processing is a special way to enter into God's story. A processional is a "going forth" for a religious ceremony or purpose. When we participate in this ritual, we are mentally, emotionally, and physically going forth into God's story! By creating their own palms and processional, participants will be able to see themselves in the story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.



Setting Up Your Space

Jerusalem was a busy place in Jesus' time and Matthew describes a vibrant and lively crowd welcoming him into the city. Feel free to leave lights on and the door open, and maybe highlight how this kind of busy scene is also one where we can worship God. Centralize your area for storytelling and crafting in the center of the room so that the periphery of the space is open, first for creating your "red carpet" and then for processing around the room. You should also create some palms before the lesson to serve as examples for participants later in the ritual and maybe even as a prop during the story.

DIVE IN (10 MINUTES)

Group Check-In

Materials:

- Nothing

During the session:

- Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own:
Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
- **Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week. What were the high points and low points of your week?** Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

COMMUNITY BUILDER (15 MINUTES)

Red Carpet Treatment

Materials:

- Long banner or piece of butcher paper
- Red construction paper (1-2 sheets per person)
- Markers
- Tape or glue

Special Note: If possible, designate a leader who is able to help participants glue or tape their red construction paper to the banner quickly. You want to make sure there is enough time for each participant to read the words they wrote down and for people to walk down the red carpet.

Before the session:

- Set up a long banner or butcher paper somewhere in your space.
- Use the red construction paper to make a few sample “red carpet” squares. Sample squares could say things like, “You’re great!” “You’re welcome here.” “Be yourself.” “Great smile!” or “God loves you.”

During the session:

- Invite the group to gather at a table that includes red construction paper and markers. **Today we are going to show each other the “red carpet” treatment. Many of us have seen a red carpet rolled out at special events to show that the people walking on it are important and being celebrated.** Ask participants to share some examples of when they’ve seen a red carpet and what it communicated to them.
- **We think red carpet treatments are for celebrities, but each of us is important and worth celebrating.**
- Pick up one of your sample squares. **Today we are going to create our own red carpet to celebrate and welcome one another to this space. Each of you will take a couple pieces of red construction paper and then write down a word or phrase that would make you feel welcomed and celebrated.**

COMMUNITY BUILDER - CONTINUED

- Invite participants to get materials and take a seat. **Once you have written your word, take it over to the long piece of paper on the other side of the room and tape it to the paper. Together, we'll roll out the red carpet!**
- Give participants time to work on creating their red carpet squares.
- As participants finish, invite them to tape or glue their squares to the paper. If it is a small group, you may want to mix in some blank red squares—better to have a long carpet interspersed with participants' words than a short one.
- Once everyone has placed their square, have everyone gather around the red carpet. **In a few minutes, we're going to hear a story about when Jesus received the red carpet treatment from a big group of people. But, first, we're going to celebrate and welcome one another like those people welcomed him.**
- Invite each person to read the word/phrase they wrote down. **What made you choose that word or phrase? Has someone said that to you before?** *[Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]*
- **When's the last time someone made you feel welcomed and celebrated?** *[Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]*
- Gather everyone at the “start” of the red carpet. **Now we're going to enjoy this red carpet treatment!**
- Invite participants to walk down the red carpet. Ask the group to cheer, wave, etc. as people walk. Make sure participants know this should be celebratory (and maybe a little silly). After everyone has walked down, gather back around the red carpet.
- Ask the following questions:
 - **How did it feel to walk down the red carpet?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: exciting, happy, joyful, good, etc.]*
 - **What was it like to have people recognize and welcome you?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: welcomed, happy, special, felt like a part of the group, etc.]*
 - **Did you feel the words we listed on the carpet come to life? How can you carry that with you in places where there isn't a red carpet?** *[Answers will vary.]*



THE STORY (15 MINUTES)

Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem

Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 27.1

Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 27.1
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 27.1
- After the story, ask: **What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God enters into our lives, God brings hope and celebration, God can show up in surprising ways, etc.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: We are seeking after God, we are creative in how we find ways to worship God, etc.]*
- **What is this story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: The world may not understand why or how we worship God, the world's expectations for how God works may look different than how God chooses to work in the world, etc.]*
- **The people who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem were seeking God in their lives. They saw Jesus and believed...and then they worshipped! Their worship was full of beauty and holiness because it was based on their deep desire for God and their open offering of the gifts they had, even simple gifts like a donkey and palm branches. How do you worship God you're your own simple gifts? What gifts do you think you have to offer to God?** *[Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]*



THE RITUAL (15 MINUTES)

Offering Our Gifts to God

Materials:

- Well-known hymn or service music (optional)
- Method for playing music (optional)
- Sample palm branches
- Green construction paper (1 piece per person)
- Markers
- Scissors
- Chenille sticks
- Tape or glue

THE RITUAL - CONTINUED

Before the session:

- Create some sample palms prior to the lesson to show participants.
- Make sure there is plenty of space around the periphery of the room for the processional.

During the session:

- If they aren't already, invite participants to gather together around the supplies. **The people in Matthew's story offer their clothes and palm branches as gifts to worship Jesus as he enters Jerusalem. But the greatest gift the people brought to Jesus was themselves. They brought their desire for God and they offered the simple things they had around them to worship, welcome, and celebrate Jesus coming into their lives. What parts of yourself – your dreams, your favorite things to do, your fears – do you bring with you when you worship God? What are your gifts? What would it look like to offer those to God?**
- Give participants time to think and reflect.
- Hold up a sample palm. **Many of you probably know what a palm is. These are the branches the people in Matthew's story used to worship God, and we still use them each year on Palm Sunday. In a moment, we are going to create palms as symbols of what we offer to God in worship. You will create a palm and then write your gifts on the palm to create a symbol of your worship and offering, like those in the story.**
- Hand out construction paper, chenille sticks, and markers. Give participants time to create their palms and write their gifts. Once everyone is finished, invite the large group back together.
- **Look at your palms. What are you offering to God in worship? Find a partner and share what you wrote down.**
- Pair up participants and invite them to share their findings with their partner.
- **Once you and your partner have finished sharing what you wrote on your palms, take some time to talk about how you can use those gifts outside of worship. How can you offer those gifts to God in your everyday life?**
- Give pairs an opportunity to share their stories with one another. Once they are finished talking, bring the large group back together.
- **We all have unique gifts to offer to God, gifts that bring God great joy. We can offer them to God when we worship together, and we can also offer them to God in the everyday moments of our lives. If our gift is kindness, we can be kind to strangers. If our gift is strength, we can help someone who is having a hard day. Like the people in the story, God calls us to worship God wherever we are and whoever we're with—offering our gifts to God and each other.**
- Take a few minutes to describe a processional using the "What's the Ritual?" paragraph on page 2.
- **In a moment, we're going to recreate a celebration like the one in Matthew's story. We will sing and wave our palms around the room. Imagine yourself truly offering your gifts and your life to God. Look around at all of the wonderful gifts and celebrating people doing the same.**

THE RITUAL - CONTINUED

- If desired, play or sing a well-known hymn or piece of service music to begin the processional. Use a song your group is comfortable with and that includes themes of worshipping God. You can also start the processional by reading Matthew 21:1-11 again as the group begins!
- At the end of the song or after a few minutes, bring the group back together.
- End with prayer. Pray the following, or use your own: **God, we want to worship you with our lives. Help us to remember that we each have gifts to offer and help us to make everyone feels celebrated and welcomed wherever we are. Amen.**

DIG DEEPER (10 MINUTES)

Paving the Way

Materials:

- Palms from previous activity
- Markers

Before the session:

- Find and bring examples of local needs in your community. This may include outreach opportunities or news stories highlighting social justice issues in your community.

During the session:

- **Matthew says that people took their clothes and placed them on the ground for Jesus' donkey. They paved the way with the shirt off their backs! Jesus says that what we would do for him, we are to do for those in need.** Ask participants to think about who in our community needs our support and love, like those in Jerusalem gave Jesus. **What needs do you see in your community?**
- Give participants a few minutes to reflect and share. If they are having trouble identifying needs, use the examples you have. After sharing, invite participants to write those community needs on the blank side of their palms.
- **Look at the needs we've written down on our palms. Now, turn your palms over to the side where you wrote your gifts. How do your unique gifts match up with the needs you see around you? What gifts could you offer to your neighbor?** Give participants a few minutes to reflect and share.
- **What commitments could you make to using your gifts to help with our community's needs?** Ask participants to share aloud and make a note on how to follow-up in future activities.
- **In a moment, we will place all of the palms together as a unified offering of our gifts.**
- You may wish to glue palms onto the "red carpet" from the Community Builder activity. Display this banner somewhere in your church.

WRAP IT UP

(5 MINUTES)

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week. Close your time together in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

Almighty God, you come into our lives and ask us to worship you. Help us to see the gifts we can offer to you and to our neighbor. Make your presence known to us in every part of our life, so that we may worship and welcome and celebrate you in everything we do. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ, send us forth to worship and love you. Amen.

Lesson Sheet 27.1

Jesus Entry Into Jerusalem

Jesus had been spending time in Galilee, where he was teaching and healing people. While he was there, he also got into some arguments with a group of people who were not sure what to make of Jesus and his miraculous ways. Then, Jesus headed to Jerusalem, a busy and bustling city that was very special to the Israelites.

8

Before Jesus went into Jerusalem, he asked his disciples to go to a certain place where he said they will find a colt and a donkey. He asked them to bring him the colt and the donkey, and he assured them, "If anyone says anything to you about it, just let them know that the Lord needs these." The disciples went quickly and found the two animals exactly where Jesus said they would be. They brought the animals back to Jesus. They placed their coats on the animals' backs for some cushioning and Jesus gently sat on them.

Jesus' request reminded many people of an old prophecy. The Prophet Zechariah had said the messiah would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey or a colt. Now Jesus was riding into Jerusalem on both!

A large crowd had gathered at the entrance to the city. Some had taken off their coats and others had cut off branches. The crowd placed both the clothes and branches on the ground, just like the disciples placed their coats on the donkey and colt. There were people all around Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. He could hear their voices in front of him and behind him. They were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (The people were shouting very special things to connect Jesus to very special people and prophecies about the messiah.)

Jesus' entry caused a stir across the whole city. Everyone was talking about him. "Who is this?" people asked. And the other people replied, "This is the prophet, Jesus, who comes from Nazareth in Galilee."