



SESSION 1 of 4

Palm Sunday

MEETING AIM

To explore the hopes and expectations we place on those we honour, and how we might worship Jesus today, two millennia after his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 19:28-44

BACKGROUND

Palm Sunday is like the opening act of Holy Week, and in a way it is a strange introduction, given the following events. Jesus is welcomed with great excitement and praise just days before the crowds turn on him and call for his execution. This day is a high moment, where the crowds recognise Jesus as a Messiah, but it is loaded with great expectation. Jesus disappoints them when he doesn't turn out to be the Messiah they wanted, dying on a cross rather than overturning the Romans. His triumph is not what they had been hoping for or expecting.

5 GATHERING TIME

As the group gathers, welcome them with refreshments and ask everyone how their week has been. If you would like to begin exploring the session topic during this time, begin by asking: "Have you ever seen or met a famous person?" Ask them to share their stories. Or you could ask: "Which famous person would you most want to meet? Which people might be worth queuing up and waiting for?"

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: a 'Beatlemania' video clip (see below) and the means to play it
Before the session, find a video on YouTube to show the group on 'Beatlemania' (the one I would recommend is 'The Beatles Welcome Home to England (1964) – British Pathé').

Explain to the group that 'Beatlemania' was the word used to describe the phenomenon of Beatles superfans in the 1960s. This video gives a sense of the excitement, anticipation and sheer volume of crowds awaiting the arrival of the Beatles.

Show the video, then ask the group if there is anyone they could see or meet who would elicit that kind of reaction from them.

15 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: Bibles; pens and paper
In today's passage we are looking at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, where the crowds go wild! This day is one we now remember as Palm Sunday because of the crowds throwing down palm leaves (and their coats) before Jesus as he rode in on a donkey. We have palm crosses to remember this day, but why does it mean so much?

Split the group into smaller segments and encourage them to read the passage together. Then ask them to come up with a modern-day retelling that will help us understand what it might look like if Jesus was visiting today. Why would people get so excited, and how would they show it? What has been going on before this? How do the crowds think this person is going to change things? Think of Beatlemania or controversial events such as President Trump visiting the UK.

Ask them to write out their modern-day retellings and then share them with the rest of the group. If you think they would be happier acting them out, offer this option.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use the following questions to explore the passage and ideas around it:

- Why do you think the crowd went so wild when Jesus entered Jerusalem? What were they expecting? Who did they think he was?
- What reactions do you think the people in your community would have today if they knew that Jesus was going to visit?
- What did Jesus mean about the rocks crying out?
- What did Jesus' entry to Jerusalem on a donkey say about who he was?
- It was a big gesture to lay down palm leaves and coats on the ground for a Messiah on a donkey to walk in on. What would be an equivalent act of welcome and worship for us today?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: card; felt-tip pens; scissors
Spend more time thinking about what the equivalent act of worship might be to throwing a palm tree or a coat down.

Give out the pens and card. Ask the group to think about what they would throw down for Jesus to walk on. What would be their act of worship and honour? What would show Jesus that he is the most important thing? Would it be their favourite top? Or their phone? Maybe it wouldn't be an object at all. It could be their time or their life plans.

Ask the group members to draw what their thing might be, and then to cut it out and lay it down in a pile together. You could ask them to share what they have drawn and why if they would like to.

5 PRAYER

You will need: a large sheet of paper; felt-tip pens; a worship song and the means to play it

Jesus said that even if the crowds stopped praising him the rocks would cry out. The idea that even rocks would respond to the goodness of Jesus and recognise him as God tells us that he is worthy of our worship!

Place the large piece of paper in the middle of your group and explain that you are going to play a worship song. While the song is playing, ask the group to write down different ways of praising Jesus. They might want to write sentences of thanks, or words that praise different characteristics of Jesus, like 'Loving' or 'Saviour'.

Play a worship song, something like 'Almighty God' by Tim Hughes, that features lyrics about rocks crying out.

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SESSION 2 of 4

Good Friday

MEETING AIM

To provide time and space to reflect on the events of the crucifixion and consider its significance.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 22:39-23:56

BACKGROUND

Looking back from the 21st Century, we read the story of Jesus' death with the knowledge that Easter Sunday is coming. However, the characters in the story don't have this perspective. Indeed, there might be young people in our groups who aren't familiar with the story and therefore don't know about the good news that is to come. Try to approach this passage with fresh eyes as you reflect on the events of the story.

5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the group to the session, asking them about their Easter holidays and how they are doing. Let this welcome blend into your opening activity of sharing hot cross buns...

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: toasters; hot cross buns; butter and various spreads (such as jam, Nutella or lemon curd); crockery and cutlery
For your introduction activity, throw a Good Friday themed feast! Toast the hot cross buns and let the group choose what they want to top them with. Be aware of and cater for any dietary requirements (for example with gluten-free hot cross buns, dairy-free spread).

Enjoy this time together and the extravagance of it. You could pique the group's interest by telling them that hot cross buns are rumoured to have originated from as early as 1361, when a monk baked buns and marked them with a cross on Good Friday before distributing them to the poor.

While you're eating you might want to discuss why we celebrate Good Friday, despite it being the day that we remember Jesus' crucifixion. You might want to explore the oxymoron of our greatest celebration as Christians also being the day of greatest tragedy.

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: printouts of Luke 22:39-23:56; highlighter pens

For the Bible reading, try a version of Lectio Divina. Lectio Divina is a practice that helps us read the Bible reflectively. You read through the passage slowly and carefully, with a prayerful attitude, meditating on specific parts of the passage that stand out as significant to you.

Ask them to join in a type of Lectio Divina with you. Give a printout of the passage and a highlighter to each group member. Explain that you're going to read the passage out to them slowly, and ask them to follow it themselves with an attitude of prayerful meditation.

Before you begin reading (or you could ask someone in your church community who is very good at reading to prepare in advance to read it out), say a prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal significant meanings within the passage. You may want to play some gentle background music (without lyrics) to help this atmosphere of contemplation, or to light a candle to demonstrate this.

Ask the group to highlight parts of the passage that feel particularly poignant. After you've finished reading the passage, encourage the group to contemplate the passage silently. Then ask them to volunteer which parts of the passage stood out as significant to them.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Moving on from chatting about revelations in relation to the passage, continue to prompt discussion with the following questions, (although stay with the discussion from the Lectio Divina activity for as long as it needs):

- Why do you think we remember this day as 'Good Friday'?
- What do Jesus' responses to his various trials tell us about him?
- Why do you think people wanted Jesus to be crucified? If he was innocent, what was it about him that made people want to punish and get rid of him?
- How do you think Jesus' followers felt over the course of the events in this passage?
- Why do you think Jesus didn't try to avoid his death on the cross?
- Why is this day so significant to Christians?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: printouts from 'Bible exploration'; pens

As we explore the passage it may ring true in new ways. This is the cycle of faith: we don't just understand something once and for all, we revisit and reassess. Revelation continues long after we first believe. This is an important part of living faith.

On the other side of their printouts, invite the group to write a response to Jesus in light of having revisited the passage about his death. You could encourage them to write a letter or poem in private, just between them and Jesus. Give each member a pen to do this and play some music again to give them the space and privacy to do so. A good song for this moment might be 'The wonder of the cross' by Vicky Beeching.

5 PRAYER

Sometimes when we remember people who have died we observe a moment of silence. At the end of this passage we read the final sentence: "On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment." We leave the disciples at the moment when their leader and friend has died, without hindsight about the resurrection of Easter Sunday. At this moment they would have felt that all hope was lost, and that they were left alone with their complex grief.

As Christians, we have the celebration of Easter Sunday – the resurrection of Jesus and the hope that this gives us – but we are missing something if we don't stop and recognise the truth that Jesus died before he rose again.

Explain this to the group, and invite them to share in a minute of silence so you can all remember the significance of Jesus' death given everything you have explored today. Invite them to share in the guilt, confusion and grief of the disciples, aware that we believe in a God who rose again but who is able to share in our moments of helplessness and hopelessness. Explain that grief is sometimes appropriate, but also that in our moments of grief there is an unseen work of resurrection waiting to occur.

If it feels appropriate, you could invite the group to stand together during the minute's silence. Say a prayer of thanksgiving to close this time.

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SESSION 3 of 4

Easter Sunday

MEETING AIM

To marvel at the fact that Jesus died for us and then rose again!

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 24:1-12

BACKGROUND

Easter Sunday is the day that everything changes for Christians. In the last session we explored the gravity and sadness of Jesus' death, and today we remember afresh the utter absurdity and hope of the resurrection! Today's session plan incorporates play and silliness, celebration and creativity as we take time to marvel at a saviour who died for us, and then rose again!

5 GATHERING TIME

Invite the group to gather. Take some time to recap on the last session of Good Friday, remembering that in the passage we last read Jesus had just been crucified. Between then and today's session came Saturday, the Sabbath day, where the disciples were left waiting with their grief, unable to prepare Jesus' body for burial because they were not allowed to work on the Sabbath. Ask the group if they have ever had a day like that Saturday.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: wrapped Easter eggs in various sizes; the twelve verses from today's Bible passage, each printed or written out on a strip of paper

Here comes a moment of nostalgia for your group! Prepare an Easter egg hunt. This may seem childish, especially if you're group is mostly older teenagers, but hopefully the promise of chocolate (or non-dairy sweets if your group requires them) may give them some motivation to get stuck in. Find a spot where this might work. Maybe there is some outside space you can use. If you think the young people would enjoy it, bring an element of competition by splitting the group in two to see which side can collect the most eggs!

Include a variety of sizes: little ones and some bigger Creme Eggs. Have twelve Creme Eggs altogether, and attach one of the verses to each one. You may need to encourage the group to share the eggs

more evenly if it is clear that some people have done much better than others (and keep a few up your sleeve to make it more even if needs be).

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: verses from 'Intro activity'; Bibles

Ask the group to separate the twelve passages from the Creme Eggs and lay them out. Challenge the group to put the passage back together in the right order. Have some Bibles ready if this proves to be a challenge.

Ask the group to think about the before and after of this story. How were the women feeling when they were on the way to the tomb? What were they talking about? What did they say when they went back to see Jesus' other followers? How do you tell people that your friend who was dead is now alive?

Go on to think about the end of the story. What did all the participants – the women, Peter and the other followers – do next?

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use the following questions to tease out the meaning of the passage and explore what Easter Sunday is about:

- Why do you think eggs are associated with Easter?
- Who do you think the 'two men in dazzling clothes' were?
- If you had been in the women's shoes, what would you have thought when you saw these men? Would you have believed what they said?
- Do you think that it is significant that the women heard about Jesus' resurrection first? If so, why?
- If you weren't one of the friends present and heard their account of what they had seen later on, what do you think you would have made of it?
- What do you think it meant that Jesus rose from the dead? Why is it so significant to Christians?
- What does Jesus' resurrection change for us today?
- How can we still remember to be as surprised and delighted by Jesus' resurrection 2,000 years later?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: large sheets of paper; art materials; examples of creative typography
This passage is so significant in relation to who we are as Christians, why we follow Jesus, why we believe in him and in the

hope we have that Jesus conquered death. Invite the group to make posters from this passage that you can put up in the space where you meet to remember this day and this passage.

Find some examples of creative typography posters to show the group for inspiration. Search on Pinterest (or Google) for 'Bible typography', and you will find some great posters of Bible passages set in interesting and creative lettering.

Give the group members the items they need to make their posters. You could give them technological options such as tablets and laptops if that's possible (this may be preferable for young people who are good at using these things). Also provide card, pens, scissors, glue and good pens for illustration. You could even find some guides to help them with the lettering.

Ask the young people to choose a phrase from the passage, either on their own or in groups. Some options could be: "He is not here, but has risen", "He has risen", "The Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again" or "Amazed at what had happened". You could use different translations of this passage for inspiration, such as *The Message*.

Give the group time to design and create their posters, and then hang them up on the walls of the room where you meet.

5 PRAYER

You will need: video of 'Rescuer' by Rend Collective and the means to show it
The song 'Rescuer' is about Jesus as our rescuer, a song that celebrates the hope Jesus represents to us and our world! Show the group the video (available on YouTube) and turn the sound up! Let them enjoy the fun and silliness of the song and video. After all, Easter Sunday is a day for celebration and the surreal!

At the end of the session pray a prayer of thanksgiving and amazement about the resurrection of Jesus, or ask a volunteer to do so.

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SESSION 4 of 4

Road to Emmaus

MEETING AIM

To explore the idea of journeying with Jesus.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 24:13-35

BACKGROUND

The passage of the 'Road to Emmaus' finds us with two followers of Jesus trying to make sense of everything that has happened by piecing together bits of information. They are tied between bits of what they know and believe, and trying to find a way forward. There's a sense of lost-ness on their journey, yet Jesus accompanies them in their chaos and reveals himself slowly through his conversation, companionship and finally in the act of breaking bread with them. This session looks at this act of finding Jesus on the journey as a way of better understanding who he is, but also recognising that we are on a journey, walking with Jesus. Encourage the group members to identify where they find themselves on their walk of faith.

5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the group with refreshments. Explain that this week you will be looking at a passage in the Bible where Jesus unexpectedly appears on a journey that two men are taking. Ask the group to share any stories of unexpected events on their own journeys, or things they have discovered on journeys.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

Challenge the group to guess who of the following celebrities are from hearing five facts about them. Start with these three examples:

CELEBRITY ONE

- I was born in Florida, but I am of Italian-American origin
- I began my career in acting
- I am now a famous singer
- My surname means 'big'
- You might think that I am a 'Dangerous Woman'

ANSWER: Ariana Grande

CELEBRITY TWO

- I am from Scotland, but the English often like to think I belong to them
- I have been awarded a knighthood, so my title is 'Sir'
- I am a double Olympic gold medallist
- I am planning to retire
- Every year I visit a place in south-west London to compete in my career at a place that is famous for having grass instead of hard flooring

ANSWER: Andy Murray

CELEBRITY THREE

- My husband and I are authors
- I am 55 (in 2019)
- I started my career as a lawyer
- I have been on James Corden's Carpool Karaoke
- I moved to Washington DC in 2009, where I lived in a big white house

ANSWER: Michelle Obama

Then ask the group to come up with their own. They need five statements about a person and the rest of the group have to try and guess who it is based on those clues.

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: Bibles

Split the young people into smaller groups and give them copies of the Bible. Ask them to find and read the passage. Then ask the groups to look through the passage and look for clues in the passage that show it was Jesus walking with the men. Ask the group to discuss these points, then share with each other as a larger group.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue the discussion with the following questions, inviting the group to ask their own questions, or teasing out points they make:

- How did Jesus make himself recognisable?
- What were the actions that showed him to be the resurrected Jesus?
- Can you relate to that feeling of your heart 'burning'?
- What things might make Jesus recognisable if you didn't know that it was him walking with you?
- The men walking started in one place and ended up in another geographically. How do you think they were changed in themselves during that journey?
- Can you relate to a sense of Jesus changing you on a journey?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: A3 paper; felt-tip pens

The passage we are looking at today is about two men meeting Jesus on a journey. This is the context in which the men met Jesus, but is also a great metaphor for the journey of faith.

Ask the group to reflect on their faith journeys by drawing a timeline, highlighting key moments of revelation or changing direction in their own lives. Give them paper and pens to draw and write the way this happened. It might be helpful if you draw out your own faith journey and explain it to them before they begin.

As they each write their journey, ask the group to leave some space at the end of their timeline to speculate about where their faith journey might take them next. They could write down ideas or prayers for the future as yet untold.

Give them time to draw these and chat about faith with them. Invite them to share with the rest of the group what they wrote about their faith journeys, but also make it comfortable to opt out if they don't want to do so.

5 PRAYER

You will need: the poem 'Footprints'

In this passage we read that the two men ask Jesus to "stay with us". This is before they have the revelation that this intriguing man is actually the resurrected Christ. They have been walking with him for some time and want more of his company.

We have been looking through our own faith journeys, where Jesus has walked with us so far, but there is still so much that is yet unwritten. Would you echo that "stay with us" request to Jesus?

Ask the group to close their eyes and reflect on whether they would ask Jesus to stay. Read the 'Footprints' poem to them. At the end of the poem, ask Jesus to "Stay with us", inviting the group to respond by saying "Amen" if they want to echo that request.

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