

Bible reading Matthew 21:1-11

Sing hosanna

THIS WEEK WE EXPLORE CELEBRATING AS A GATHERED COMMUNITY.

Today, as we focus on Jesus entering Jerusalem, less than a week before his journey to the cross, we explore the reaction of a crowd who seem to be carried away in acts of praise. As a church community – and as individuals – do we have a reputation for celebration?



Bible notes

Two blind men joined the crowd walking with Jesus from Jericho. Calling out, 'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!' and asking, 'Lord, let our eyes be opened', their sight was restored and they followed him to Jerusalem (20:29-34). He had made careful preparations to ride into the city as a bold prophetic sign, fulfilling 'what had been spoken through the prophet' in Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9. The peaceful king of those awaiting God's deliverance entered the Temple, where, in another bold prophetic sign, he drove out the merchants and cured the blind and lame (vv.12-17). This pilgrim, 'who comes in the name of the Lord' (Psalm 118:26), himself sings the festival psalms (113-118, the 'Hallel') with his disciples (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26). But the words are now about him, 'the Son of David' cheered by the crowd, 'Hosanna' (Psalm 118:25; translated in NRSV as 'save us'). Like the blind men, the crowd's eyes are opened to recognise Jesus. In celebratory mood, they contribute their precious cloaks (see 5:40 and 9:16), recalling an earlier time when 'they all took their cloaks and spread them for him on the bare steps; and they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, "Jehu is king"' (2 Kings 9:13). David had banished the blind and the lame from the house of the Lord (2 Samuel 5:8), but this Son of David welcomes them into the 'house of prayer', where he heals them. And the children cry out in the Temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David' (v.9).

First impressions

- Share a story about a community celebration you've participated in.
- What opportunities can you see for gathering your community together?
- Does your church – do you – have a reputation for celebration?



PLAY

Play a 'crowd game' with a few other people – friends or family members. Lay a few sheets of newspaper on the ground to make a sort of mat. The challenge is to see how many people can stand together on it. Take away one sheet and try again. If it is too easy, fold the sheet in half. What size sheet do you need, to still get everyone on? This, perhaps, is a glimpse into what crowd in Jerusalem experienced. With everyone on the smallest sheet, try dancing and jumping for joy!

Pray



Using the palm cross/leaves you were given at church – or making your own paper version (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCKXyiA4JiM>) – and having learned the BSL sign for applause (arms raised, open hands twisting back and forth), imagining that you are in the crowd watching Jesus arrive. Jump up and down, wave your palm, and give applause (BSL-style). Will you do this where no one can see, or could you do it when they can – and you might have to explain what you are doing?

LISTEN



Listen to 'Be exalted', by Watoto Children's Choir on *Oh What Love* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0_J2uDyCkK). As you do so, try to imagine you are with the disciples on the day Jesus arrived in Jerusalem. Either read the story (Matthew 21:1-11) one verses at a time, followed by a short pause for reflection. Or read it through then recreate it using emojis.

A prayer of thanksgiving

We praise you, Lord,
that you travelled the road that led to your death,
not with armies but gently, riding on a donkey.
We thank you that, wherever you call us to travel,
into whatever situation, we too can go gently.
Surrounded by your love and your community,
we go out today in your name, singing
Hosanna in the highest heaven.

REFLECT

With the focus on celebration, think about your church as a community of celebration – not just on Palm Sunday (or Easter/Christmas), but all the time. Or to put it another way, when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, the people were seen to celebrate; has Jesus arrived in your church? Does it show? If the answer is 'no' or 'not enough', what might you do about it? Alternatively, you could think in terms of yourself: are you someone who celebrates following Jesus? Does it show? What could you do to make this year's Holy Week and Easter extra special?