

At the Cross

Devotional Guide for Holy Week 2023
using a Palm Cross guide

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²⁴ *Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*

PREFACE

This year's Holy Week – the eight days between Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday – is special. To help us enter into quiet contemplation, I have given us each a palm cross, handmade from olive trees from Israel. Holding a palm cross during prayer or meditation can serve as a tangible reminder of the significance of Jesus' sacrifice and the hope of the resurrection. We are, quite literally, taking up the Cross...

This is a good opportunity to remember, reflect and respond as disciples of Jesus. I have carefully selected portions of Scriptures and prepared questions for your contemplation during these eight days. These questions will challenge you to think deeply about *the sacrifice of Jesus at the Cross*. Isaiah 53:3-5 reminds us:

*³He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

*⁴Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.*

*⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.*

In addition, I've included a guide on how to use the palm cross and two charts to help you trace the timeline, events, and locations with the corresponding passages in the bible at the end of this devotional guide. May your Holy Week bring you closer to God and remind you of the full penalty of our sins that Jesus bore for us to be healed.

Christ died for us,

Pastor Desmond Soh
2 April 2023

How to use the Palm Cross

Before meditating and responding to the questions, do the following:

1. Find a quiet and peaceful place where you can sit and relax without any distractions. Fix a time, preferably in the early morning. Get a small notebook and record any thoughts and reflections as you go through the exercise.
2. Take a few deep breaths and allow yourself to become fully present in the moment. Listen to your own breathing and the sound around you. What do you hear? What thoughts have intruded your mind?
3. Hold the palm cross in your hands and observe its shape and texture. Notice any imperfections or unique details. Feel the weight. Hold firmly and squeeze the cross.
4. Reflect on the symbolism of the palm cross and what it represents for you personally. Think about how it reminds you of Jesus and what he has said in Scriptures.
5. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths, focusing on the sensation of the cross in your hands. Imagine that you are holding onto the cross as a source of strength and comfort.
6. As you continue to breathe deeply, imagine that you are handing over your worries, fears, and concerns to God. As you exhale, surrender these burdens to our Lord.
7. Spend a few moments in silent prayer, thanking God for His love and grace, and asking for His guidance and wisdom in your life.
8. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and take a few more deep breaths. Hold onto the palm cross for a few more moments, feeling the connection to God and the reminder of His presence in your life.
9. Finally, take the palm cross with you as a tangible reminder of your meditation and reflection, and allow it to serve as a source of comfort and strength in your daily life. You may want to carry this cross in your pocket and take it out whenever possible.

As you meditate on the cross, may palm cross remind you of the life of Jesus, such as his triumphal entry into Jerusalem or the ultimate victory of Christ over sin and death. May the cross serve as a reminder of the suffering and sacrifice that Jesus endured, inspiring you to reflect on your own faith and commitment to following in the footsteps of Christ.

*Truly, truly, I say to you,
you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful,
but your sorrow will turn into joy.*

JOHN 16:20

Palm Sunday

³⁷ As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, “**Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!**” ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “**Teacher, rebuke your disciples.**” ⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” Luke 19:27-40

Palm Cross Meditation: Hold the palm cross in your hands and reflect on how it reminds you of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Think about how it represents the hope and joy of the crowds as they welcomed Jesus as their king. Imagine yourself as one of the people in the crowd, waving a palm branch and praising God for His goodness and grace.

Reflection Questions:

What emotions did Jesus feel as he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, knowing what was to come? (Matthew 21:1-11)

What does it mean to you to welcome Jesus into your life and heart, as the people welcomed Him into Jerusalem?

Background

Read Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19

Holy Monday

¹²And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹³He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

Matthew 21:12-13

Palm Cross Meditation: Squeeze and hold the palm cross in your hands and reflect on how Jesus must have felt when he drove those money-changers and those who sold pigeons out of the temple. As your palm aches from squeezing the palm cross, think about how it represents the righteous anger and zeal that Jesus had for God's house and His desire to see it treated with respect and honor.

Reflection Questions:

We all have some ideas of who is Jesus. When you think of Jesus, who do you imagine him to be? What is your impression of Jesus when he overturned the tables at the Temple?

The Pharisees were indignant when they saw Jesus healing the blind and lame, and the adoration of the people towards him. Were there times when you feel indignant when you feel that you were left out of the limelight? Sidelined? What are some areas in your life where you struggle with pride and self-centeredness?

Background

Read: Matthew 21:12-22; Mark 11:12-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 12:20-36

Holy Tuesday

³⁷“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁸See, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Matthew 23::37-39

Palm Cross Meditation: Hold the palm cross in your hands and reflect on how it reminds you of Jesus’ grief as he foresaw and prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem. Think of how God would have felt when He repeatedly sent His messengers to warn, rebuke and chastise Israel to no avail.

Reflection Questions:

How did Jesus respond to those who, despite his miracles and declarative teachings, doubted his identity as the Son of God? How would you have felt when no one believes in your words?

How can you show patient love and compassion to those around you, even in difficult circumstances, as Jesus did?

Background

Read: Matthew 21:23-23:39; Mark 12:1-44; Luke 20:1-21:4

Spy Wednesday¹

¹⁰Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. ¹¹And when they heard it, they were glad and promised to give him money. And he sought an opportunity to betray him.
Mark 14:10-11

Palm Cross Meditation: Hold the palm cross in your hands and reflect on how it reminds you of Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Think about how it represents the pain and sorrow that Jesus must have felt when one of His closest friends turned against Him.

Reflection Questions:

We all have been betrayed. Some of us have even betrayed others... and God when we sin against Him. In Matthew's gospel (Mt 26), Judas Iscariot's betrayal narrative happened immediately after the woman's anointing of Jesus (26:6-13). What is the contrast between the woman and Judas?

In what areas of your life do you need to repent and seek forgiveness from God and others? (Matthew 26:14-16, 47-50) How can you extend grace and forgiveness to those who have wronged you? (Ephesians 4:32)

Background

Read: Matthew 26:1-16; Mark 14:1-11; Luke 22:1-6, John 12:37-50

¹ Wednesday is called Spy Wednesday because of the reference to the betrayal of Judas Iscariot in Matthew 26:14-16. He was a clandestine spy amongst the 12 disciples of Jesus Christ.

Maundy Thursday²

³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

John 13:3-5

Palm Cross Meditation: Hold the palm cross in your hands and reflect on Jesus washing His disciples' feet. Think about how it represents the humility and servant-heartedness that Jesus demonstrated, and how you can follow His example in your own life.

Reflection Questions:

How can you practice humility and serve others, as demonstrated by Jesus washing His disciples' feet? (John 13:1-17)

What are some ways that your humility can be a light to those around you and share the hope of the Gospel? (1 Peter 3:15-16)

Background

Read: Matthew 26:17-46; Mark 14:12-42; Luke 22:7-46; John 13:1-38

² *Maundy* in Maundy Thursday (Holy Thursday) comes from the Latin word *mandatum* ("mandate" or "command"), referring to Christ's commandment to His disciples at the Last Supper in John 13:34 "A new *commandment* I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

Good Friday

Father, Forgive Them... (Luke 23:34)

This Day You Will Be with Me in Paradise... (Luke 23:43)

Woman, Behold Your Son... (John 19:26-27)

My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me? (Mark 15:34)

I Thirst... (John 19:28)

It Is Finished... (John 19:30)

Father, Into Your Hands I Commit My Spirit... (Luke 23:46)

Palm Cross Meditation: Hold the palm cross in your hands and reflect on how it reminds you of Jesus' crucifixion and death. Feel the weight of the small palm cross and imagine the massive, painful and heavy cross which Jesus bore, and the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus made for you.

Reflection Questions:

Reflect on the seven last words of Jesus (see above). Personalize these words to yourself. How have your sins weighed on Jesus?

How can you find hope and comfort in the knowledge of God's love and mercy, as demonstrated through the sacrifice of His Son? How can you rest in the assurance of God's love and salvation, even in the midst of suffering?

Background

Read: Matthew 27:1-61; Mark 15:1-47; Luke 23:1-56; John 18:28-19:42

Holy Saturday

⁵⁴It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. ⁵⁵The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. ⁵⁶Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Luke 23:54-56

Palm Cross Meditation: Put the palm cross aside for today. Explore your thoughts and reflections over the past six days. Read your notes.

Reflection Questions:

Reflect on the thoughts and feelings of those who prepared the body of Christ. It would have taken a lot of courage for the women and Joseph of Arimathea to ask for the body of Christ to be buried. What are some areas in your life where you need to let go of fear and trust in God's plan, as demonstrated in the resurrection?

How would the disciples feel at this moment while their fellow countrymen celebrate the Passover with feasting and songs?

Background

Read: Matthew 27:62-66; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 23:56; John 19:38-42

Easter Sunday

⁹[[Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. ¹⁰She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. ¹¹But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. Mark 16:9-11

Palm Cross Meditation: Hold the palm cross in your hands and reflect on how it reminds you of the resurrection of Jesus. Think about how it represents the hope and joy of new life and the victory over sin and death. Remember Jesus call to carry the cross to follow him. Bring the palm cross to church today.

Reflection Questions:

How does the resurrection of Jesus impact your daily life and give you hope for the future?

How can you share the joy and hope of the Easter message with others, and live out the truth of the resurrection in your own life?

Background

Read: Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:1-53; John 20:1-21:25

HOLY WEEK

EVENT	SUN	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN	LOCATION
Triumphal entry into Jerusalem		21:1-11	11:1-10	19:29-44	12:12-19	
Jesus looks around the temple			11:11			MOUNT OF OLIVES
Jesus returns to Bethany			11:11			JERUSALEM
						BETHANY
Jesus curses the barren fig tree		21:18-19	11:18			MOUNT OF OLIVES
Jesus cleanses the temple		21:12-13	11:15-18	19:45-48		JERUSALEM
Certain Greeks ask to see Jesus					12:20-36	
Jesus rebukes unbelief					12:37-50	
Jesus returns to Bethany			11:19			BETHANY
Disciples see the fully withered fig tree		21:19-22	11:20-26	21:37-38		MOUNT OF OLIVES
Jesus' authority questioned by leaders		21:23-27	11:27-33	20:1-8		JERUSALEM
Parable of the two sons		21:23-27				
Parable of the vinedressers		21:33-46	12:1-12	20:9-19		
Parable of the wedding feast		22:1-14				
Pharisees question about paying taxes		22:15-22	12:13-17	20:20-26		
Pharisees question about the resurrection		22:23-33	12:18-27	20:27-40		
Scribe questions about the great commandment		22:35-40	12:28-34			
Jesus' question about David's Lord		22:41-46	12:35-37	20:41-44		
Woe to the scribes and Pharisees		23:1-39	12:38-40	20:45-47		
Poor widow's mite			12:41-44	21:1-4		
Prophecy of destruction of Jerusalem and the Lord's coming		24:1-51	13:1-37	21:5-36		MOUNT OF OLIVES
Parable of the ten virgins		25:1-13				
Parable of the talents		25:14-30				
Parable of the sheep and the goats		25:31-46				
Sanhedrin plots to kill Jesus		26:1-5	14:1-2	22:1-2		JERUSALEM
Judas agrees to betray Jesus		26:14-16	14:10-11	22:3-6		
Preparation for the Passover		26:17-19	14:12-16	22:7-13		
Jesus and the disciples assemble for the Passover feast		26:20	14:17	22:14-16	13:1	
Disciples argue over who is the greatest				22:24-30		
Jesus washes the disciples' feet					13:2-17	
Jesus identifies his betrayer		26:21-25	14:18-21	22:21-23	13:18-30	
Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper		26:26-29	14:22-25	22:15-20		
The commandment of love					13:31-35	
Jesus predicts Peter's denial		26:31-35	14:27-31	22:31-38	13:36-38	
Jesus gives discourse in the upper room					14:1-30	
Jesus and the disciples sing a hymn and depart the upper room		26:30	14:26		14:1-31	
Jesus' discourse on the way to Gethsemane					15:1-16:33	
Jesus prays for his disciples					17:1-26	
Jesus prays in Gethsemane		26:36-46	14:32-42	22:39-46	18:1	MOUNT OF OLIVES
Jesus is betrayed and arrested		26:47-56	14:43-52	22:47-53	18:2-12	
Jesus is brought before Annas					18:13-14	JERUSALEM
Jesus is brought before Caiaphas					18:24	
Jesus is condemned and mistreated by the Sanhedrin throughout the night		26:57-68	14:53-65	22:54, 66-72		
Peter denies Jesus three times		26:58, 69-75	14:54, 66-72	22:54-62	18:15-18, 25-27	
Sanhedrin formally condemns Jesus		27:1	15:1	22:66-71		
Judas goes out and commits suicide		27:3-10				FIELD OF BLOOD
Jesus appears before Pilate		27:2, 11-14	15:1-5	23:1-7	18:28-38	JERUSALEM
Jesus appears before Herod				23:8-12		
Jesus appears before Pilate again		27:15-23	15:6-14	23:13-22	18:39-40	
Jesus is scourged and mocked by the Romans		27:27-31	15:16-19		19:1-3	
Pilate consents to Jesus' death		27:22-26	15:12-15	23:20-25	19:4-16	
Jesus is led away to be crucified		27:31-34	15:20-23	23:26-32	19:16-17	CALVARY
Jesus on the cross for the first three hours		27:35-44	15:24-32	23:33-43	19:18-24	
Jesus on the cross for the final three hours		27:45-50	15:33-37	23:44, 46	19:25-30	
Miracles accompanying the crucifixion		27:51-56	15:38-41	23:45, 47-49		
Joseph buries the body of Jesus		27:57-61	15:42-47	23:50-55	19:31-42	GARDEN TOMB
Jewish leaders secure the tomb		27:62-66				
The women observe the Sabbath day				23:56		AT HOME
The women come to the tomb and find Jesus risen!		28:1-8	16:1-9	24:1-8	20:1	GARDEN TOMB

Source: <https://churchpop.com/2015/03/29/the-timeline-of-holy-week-mapped-in-1-infograph>

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