

## LECTIONARY GUIDE for Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 and Matthew 21:1-11

### Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

This psalm of thanksgiving speaks of how God's *steadfast love* (v. 1 *hesed*) endures forever. Judging by its content, it may have been used in a procession to the Temple before a battle. The psalmist and people gave thanks for God's "mighty hand" and delivering acts, which removed them from distress ("narrowness or restriction") to confidence ("a broad place").

Even today, Egyptian Jews sing this psalm before and after the Passover meal. "The gates of the Lord" indicate the Temple entrance. Although verses 3-18 are omitted in our reading, these seem to indicate that *everyone*, regardless of their position, is invited to give thanks. Here it is acknowledged that the "Lord's doing" is great. There is no need to fear anyone or anything. God has the power to transform *all* situations. The procession ends at the altar, where praise is given.

Thus, begins again the cycle of distress, deliverance, thanksgiving, praise.

### Ten Questions

1. God's steadfast love is central in this psalm. Is it described more for individuals or groups—worshippers, non-worshippers, the people of Israel?
2. Why do you think that some believe that this was a processional song to thank God before going to battle? [*"gates of the Lord, festal procession with branches, horns of the altar"*] Have we seen examples of such ceremonies in our own lives?
3. Have we ever participated in a procession with singing that led to the altar or Communion Table? What did it feel like to step forward, sing or chant, and direct ourselves to what was central in a sanctuary?
4. How is the written form of psalms (songs) different from the form (narratives) of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible? How do the contrasting forms affect us?
5. What does the variety in literary form of the Hebrew books—for example, histories, commandments and rules, prophecies, allegories, poems and songs—say about the ways we can experience God?
6. What are some examples in which God's "mighty hand" intervened in the lives of the people of Israel?
7. What might some examples of God leading us from distress to confidence be in our life, or the life of a loved one?

8. How in this time of coping with Covid 19 infections do we respond emotionally after our psalm says that there is nothing to fear?
9. During this crisis, what are some instances that we have witnessed of healing, service to others, love, fidelity, concern for all and care for groups?
10. Our lection says that after this processional psalm finds its culmination at the altar, the worshippers (and we) return to the cycle of crisis, deliverance, thanksgiving and praise to God. Is this true for us, and those whom we love? How might this relate to why we worship – together?

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### **Matthew 21:1-11**

Many of us know the story of Jesus' entry (for Palm Sunday) into Jerusalem. But do we know that Matthew, Mark and Luke each tell the story slightly differently? Matthew tries to show us that Jesus is the Messiah. He is interested in crowds—how some gathered around Jesus, questioned him, and followed him. These crowds ask, *who is this?* Matthew shows that Jesus stands in their tradition of Torah, is related to David, and is a prophet. The drama starts in the Mount of Olives, from where it was written that the Messiah would come (Zechariah 14:1-11). It is heightened by the prophetic phrases, *Tell the daughters of Zion...that your savior has come*. Into the turmoil (earthquake) of the city, Jesus arrives as a victorious and peaceful king, hearing the shouts of *hosannas* (*Save us*) of the crowd, and awaiting what is to come. No matter, that Matthew has taken his cue from earlier scripture but mistranslated it from Hebrew into Greek as a donkey *and* a colt; and *them*. Only one beast is needed to carry our Lord!

### **Ten Questions**

1. With a major detour during Lent, can we really believe it is Palm Sunday? What has happened to us and our congregation since our Ash Wednesday service with the Imposition of Ashes?
2. Matthew's account of Jesus' Entry into Jerusalem is dramatic. How might we tell it in our own words?
3. How are Mark's and Luke's versions of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem slightly different from Matthew's? (See Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-38). How does each affect us?
4. How is John's different from the other three (Synoptic) gospels? Might he have had a different experience of Jesus, used different sources, and/or wanted to convey a different understanding of Christ? How does John's version affect us?

5. Matthew studied the Hebrew Bible, knew the Torah and the writings of the Prophets by heart. As a result, he riddled his story with messianic titles, prophecies and phrases that pointed to his belief in Jesus as the Messiah whom many Jews had been expecting. Which of these references to Jesus speak to us?
6. Have we ever witnessed a similar “ticker tape parade” like Jesus’ with crowds, shouting and chaos? Describe them. Who was central? What was satisfying, concerning, or maybe even scary?
7. Why were there a beast of burden to carry Jesus, waving palm branches, cloaks strewn before him on the road, with cries of *hosanna*? Was/is he really a king? How?
8. “*Turmoil*” (v. 10) is a play on words with “*earthquake*.” Matthew says that the whole city was in turmoil. When during Holy Week, on Holy Friday, will we hear again about an *earthquake*? Have we ever experienced an earthquake? What was it like? Were our foundations shaken?
9. Palm Sunday celebrates Jesus’ procession from the Mt. of Olives, outside the gates of the city, through the gates, deep into the heart of Jerusalem. Verse 12 concludes, *Jesus entered the temple of God*. Does this procession remind us of Psalm 118, a procession before battle? When Jesus entered the sanctuary, overturning the tables of the money-changers, might he have started a battle?
10. Having read Psalm 118 and Matthew’s account of Jesus’ Entry, take some time now to take a deep breath and recall what will happen during Holy Week. For sure, the crowds, who hail Jesus as Messiah on Palm Sunday, changed their tune by Good Friday.

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