

For Working Preacher

Walking the Palm Sunday Path in Lent: A Sermon Series for 2026

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During Lent, preachers help congregations face vital questions about Jesus and the new reign he proclaims. We repent and seek clarity. We take stock of our lives, reconsider the world we inhabit, and prepare to reencounter Jesus in the story of his self-giving, suffering, and resurrection. Sometimes preachers easily discern exactly how they plan to preach their way through Lent. Sometimes they benefit from a little help and solidarity, especially when the stakes feel as high as they do in 2026.

Working Preacher is here to help. If you are interested in a preaching series that will allow you to focus on the character of Jesus and his vision for transforming the world, my colleagues and I have designed one for you.

Our goal for the series is to encourage people to follow Jesus along the path he walked into Jerusalem and eventually to the cross. As he approached the city, he staged a procession, a public display that both called into question the usual symbols and privileges of power and embraced a different way. Of course we know how the story ended, but it's important to remember—and to allow our congregations to remember—that Jesus's message was public and provocative. His followers understood the risk. The original Palm Sunday was an occasion of joy and peril, all rolled into a tight and combustible ball of earnest expectation.

In preparing this series, I and others involved with Working Preacher have been inspired by saints we know who are part of the dozens of faith-based organizations in the US currently organizing Christians from a wide array of denominations to participate in the “Palm Sunday Path.” The Palm Sunday Path is a

movement calling Christians to put their faith into visible action, processing together during the afternoon of Palm Sunday (March 29, 2026) in state capitals and other cities across the country.

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“Who is this?” That question raced through Jerusalem when Jesus arrived in the city, riding a humble mount while bathed in the hopeful Hosannas shouted by a crowd (Matthew 21:10).

Preachers and their congregations take up the same question every year. Whom, exactly, are we following? Why put our trust in him? Why should others? What has he come to expose about the world and what are his promises for us? What will be the cost? Lent is coming, and for many of us those questions are as urgent this year as in any other residing in our memories.

Who is this Jesus? The Gospels depict him as a leader who stirred up an obvious contrast as he journeyed toward Jerusalem. Those on the Palm Sunday Path will follow his lead, processing together and proclaiming God’s values as clear contrasts to increasingly familiar politics of cruelty, greed, intimidation, and injustice.

Other Palm Sunday Path action is being planned for July 3, 2026. You can learn more about the whole movement at this website: [INSERT THE URL]. This sermon series provides opportunities for preachers to convey the public character of Jesus’s ministry, reminding them of where Lent is leading us. The series might help you, if you choose, to build energy in your context so people are emboldened to participate in the Palm Sunday Path, joining their Christian kin in a hope-filled, visible proclamation of Jesus, who rejected the false glory of domination and retribution. God has a better way.

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What follows is an overview of how the series will proceed, so you can consider it all at once. Working Preacher is also publishing extended commentaries on each of these biblical passages by Rev. Dr. Eric Barreto (Week 1), Rev. Dr. Matt Skinner (Week 2), Rev. Dr. Cody Sanders (Week 3), Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis (Week 4), Rev. Dr. Melva Sampson (Week 5), and Bishop Bill Tesch (Palm Sunday).

Week 1: Luke 19:29–40 Jesus’s Triumphal Entry (Luke’s Version)

We begin Lent by calling attention to where the season will conclude: Jesus’s “triumphal entry” and the grand expectations of a crowd. The public display of his entry focuses our attention on a clash of visions, a clash that will prove deadly. The one acclaimed king by his followers will be cynically dismissed as a royal pretender by Pontius Pilate. He will execute Jesus beneath a sign sarcastically identifying him as “King of the Jews.” Lent prepares us to hear the story about the rejection of Jesus rightly. He will be, simply, overpowered. It begins with Jesus’s peculiar decision to ride a colt into Jerusalem. Apparently a warhorse doesn’t align with his vision of a different kind of kingship and a kingdom based on love. The crowd seems content with the upside-down symbolism: they choose Jesus’s rule. They recognize he acts in God’s power (“name”) and promises peace. Through their cries and their willingness to place their cloaks on the road, the crowd makes a public confession about their political and spiritual commitments. The hoofprints that stain their garments become lasting, visible reminders of their willingness to align themselves with Jesus. The risks are obvious. The Pharisees who are with Jesus sense the danger and urge moderation, or at least a much quieter declaration. But it’s too late and the situation too volatile. Even the stones along the path yearn for the peace Jesus brings with him; they are ready to call out. This Lent, in a season of great distress in our world, this series will focus us on the path Jesus walks, as well as the promises and perils involved in our decision to join him on that path.

Week 2: Mark 12:1–12 The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

Jesus tells this parable explicitly “against” some of the most powerful people in Judea: the chief priests, scribes, and elders. The story about a vineyard functions to indict the people atop the hierarchy of power in Jerusalem, implicitly characterizing their rejection of him as an act of rebellion against God. The parable tells of vineyard caretakers who refuse to be accountable and resort to violence, illustrating the leadership’s refusal to accept Jesus as God’s own representative. With the parable, Jesus indicates his execution is evidence of authorities’ determination to shirk the responsibilities of generous leadership. The parable implies that aligning with the kingdom Jesus preaches is considered by some to be too costly. The parable risks propping up longstanding anti-Jewish attitudes among Christians, which means we need to look carefully at the people the parable specifically indicts. It’s not simply about religious people or Jews in general but about religious insiders, even religious insiders who are under pressure to satisfy the demands of an empire that allows them to maintain their religious responsibilities under strict conditions. In response to the parable, we might ask: what are some of the concessions we make (or, the church makes), in order to stay in good standing in our society? How does the way of Jesus look too invasive, too costly, or too disruptive to us? What violence do we permit, if not perpetrate, in order to maintain comfort and privilege? The Palm Sunday Path calls us all to repentance.

Week 3: Matthew 24:1–14 The Beginning of Jesus’s Temple Discourse

In each of the three Synoptic Gospels Jesus issues warnings about coming calamities. All of the versions of this speech describe those calamities with some connection to the Great War and the subsequent destruction of the temple (66–70 CE). At the same time, there are also ways in which his warnings apply to life in general. The cross will not eliminate the threats of natural disasters, violence, religious bad actors, and hardship for anyone. Life is difficult and our vulnerability is an ever-present reality. Only Matthew’s version of this speech contains an interesting line, in which Jesus warns, “Because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold” (24:12). What do we do when the stress of this world becomes too much to bear? For some, loving others becomes too painful, too risky, or too costly. What is the church’s role in the midst of all the chaos? That role is not to allow our love to cool, nor is it

to withdraw and be concerned only about our own survival. It is, rather, to continue proclaiming the gospel in our words and deeds. The gospel is a message about a love that remains unquenchable and about a God who knows what it means to show solidarity with those who suffer because of the cruelty and greed that the rulers of this world exploit to their own advantage. The Palm Sunday Path calls us to be vigilant.

Week 4: John 13:1–9, 33–35 The Foot Washing and the New Commandment

The path Jesus blazes at Palm Sunday is not only about public witness and the struggles against powerful systems and oppressive realities. It is also a path that leads us closer to one another in the process. When Jesus is alone with his followers, he illustrates the stark contrast between the values that undergird his vision for a restored society on one hand and the strategies of those who use power to dominate on the other hand. He characterizes his path as one of service and humility when he commands his followers to imitate him by washing one another's feet, surrendering status and advantage for the sake of someone else, even if it involves serving just one person at a time. Jesus goes on to urge his followers to be known for the love they have for one another. The images of humble kingship he displayed at Palm Sunday remain apparent here in the last night he shares with his friends. He celebrates the dignity and worth of each person. The Palm Sunday Path calls us to offer self-giving love.

Week 5: Luke 23:39–43 Jesus Promises Paradise to Another Victim of Crucifixion

At the moment when Jesus looks most powerless, humiliated, and pitiable, his power to bless and “save” is undiminished. This scene offers us Jesus, as he is being executed with the mocking placard “King of the Jews” attached to his cross, still doing what he came among us to do: welcoming the outcast, extending compassion, and promising fellowship and community. We misunderstand Christian faith if we think Jesus is mostly interested in *describing* or *explaining* his way of walking with God. Instead, he *enacts* those new realities of reconciliation, justice, and goodwill. They aren't abstract topics; they are part of his very self, even up to the point when his life is being wrung out of his body. In this scene we

learn again that no one is beyond the reach of God's love, not even someone designated (for whatever set of reasons) for a dehumanizing death. We also learn that there is no bottom to the reservoir of God's love. Jesus promises mercy, not vengeance. The church takes its cue from Jesus's own example here, situating itself among the lives that are presumed to be worthless, expendable, accursed, or ignored. The Palm Sunday Path does not call us to wish our neighbors into a better life after this one; it calls us to accompany them.

Palm Sunday: Matthew 21:1–11 Jesus's Triumphal Entry (Matthew's Version)

Yes, the first week in this series dwelled in a story of Jesus's triumphal entry (from Luke), but now on Palm Sunday we return to the event, now told from Matthew's point of view. Several weeks ago Luke showed us a hopeful crowd acclaiming Jesus as a God-sent king. Here, on Palm Sunday, our attention falls on the symbolism Jesus chooses for the occasion. He embarks on a royal procession into the city that represents Israel's hopes of living as God's redeemed people. Yet this royal procession intends to be strange, for it inverts the expected symbols and values. Jesus eschews a horse and other signs of dominance. He subverts conventional understandings of greatness, success, and power. And he does all of that in the face of imperious power, for Roman authorities are likely already gathering in the city in advance of Passover. Accordingly, the church does not exist to rule like kings in Jesus's absence. We take on the same kind of dispossessed power, eschewing the tools of supremacy and coercion. We recognize the risks in doing so, for the powers that be do not appreciate being held accountable or having their oppressive character unmasked. The point of it all, finally, is the cry of "Hosanna!" ("Save now!"). We proclaim a king, a leader, a savior who isn't interested in seizing power for himself but in extending protection to all who need it. The Palm Sunday Path calls us to make that proclamation public.