

RESCUED

PALM SUNDAY † MAUNDY THURSDAY † GOOD FRIDAY † EASTER SUNDAY

Palm Sunday

Matthew 21:1–22, Ephesians 2:1–3

Palm Sunday is a great opportunity for a family-focused service, building on the feeling of celebration and community associated with Palm Sunday and the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. You might like to put together some children's packs (as suggested below) for the children to use during the sermon, or the children could go out for a short time (using one of the suggested activities) and return at the end of the service to finish the celebration together.

Interactive Message

For this message you will need:

- In the hall (Table A): A table set for a party/meal in a plain/used/boring manner (cheap paper bowls with empty lolly wrappers around them, cheap paper plates with crumbs/food scraps on them, cheap paper or plastic cups with a little water or juice in them or spilled over table, popped balloons and scrunched newspaper on the floor, one or two misplaced/tipped chairs etc. Be creative.)
- In the morning tea room (Table B): A table set up for a colourful/exciting kids party (coloured bowls filled with lollies, coloured plates stocked with snacks/good food and party food, coloured cups, jugs of cordial/juice/soft drink, balloons, streamers, party hats and other party decorations to make this an exciting party, with enough chairs for each child etc.)
- A different leader for each table (Leader A/Leader B – you might even like to give them a party hat with Table A and Table B on them).
- Some video footage or a photo of Table B to put up on the projector screen in the hall, near Table A.

Have Table A set up out the front of the congregation before you begin. Have Leader A come and stand near the table with a grumpy facial expression. Explain to the children and the congregation that Leader A has invited some of them to a party/dinner as you direct their attention to the set up table.

→ Who loves going to a party?

→ Choose a couple of the children to come and explore the table and party area that they have been invited to.

→ Ask the children what they thought. Are they excited? Why/why not?

In Ephesians 2:1–10, Paul writes about life with Jesus and life without Jesus. Without Jesus, Paul talks about a life of disobedience, sin, anger and death—but with Jesus, Paul describes a life that is saved and he uses words like grace, kindness, love, mercy and being alive.

I wonder if life without Jesus could look a bit like this party: messy, uninviting, grumpy people, nothing that is good for us etc.

What could life be like with Jesus? How would you describe a life with Jesus in it? (Ask the children and congregation for some suggestions.)

I wonder how we might get from this sort of life (indicate Table A) to this sort of life (refer to picture of Table B).

→ We can stay here or we can choose to go to the other space, to Table B where we are all invited and welcome. It certainly looks like a nicer place than this, where we are loved and cared for and that there are good things for all of us.

→ What do you think, will we stay here or go out there?

→ Do you know how to get there?

→ Okay, we will go, but maybe when we have all finished church today we can all go together.

We have just been thinking about parties and where we would like to be, but I want you to think about what it is like to have Jesus with you and what it might be like if you didn't. You know, you have a choice of if you want to do life with Jesus or without Him.

Activity Suggestions

These activities can be used in a variety of settings as you explore the theme with your kids, e.g. kids church, kids club during the week, on some tables during church, or as the kids go out during the message.

- **Invitations:** It would be great to invite someone to come to church for one of your Easter activities/services. Discuss who the children might like to invite and why. Think particularly about those who might not know what it is like to live a life with Jesus. (Make sure that in your discussions that you talk with your child about the importance of asking but that, sometimes, people might say 'no' and not be able to attend for a variety of reasons.)

Link: (it would be great to have a variety of party invitations to show the children) We are celebrating today because Jesus came into Jerusalem at the beginning of the journey to make it possible for us to be connected with Him and be a part of His kingdom. There might be some people who would like to join in the celebrations but don't know all the details. Imagine if someone invited you to their party but you didn't have the details, you didn't know how to get there. We are going to make some invitations for you to give to someone so that they will know how to get to the Easter celebrations here at church. (Send the invitations that you have created home with the information below in the Home & Beyond section. Families can then choose to invite someone to church for one of your Easter activities/services. Make sure that all the information needed is included on the invitation.)

- **Pictures:** Choose a large black and white picture from the local newspaper (it doesn't matter what the picture is of, but if it has some meaning that you can tie into the topic or at least prompt a good discussion with your kids, this would help) and cut out two copies of it from two papers. Look at the picture together and think about how you could make it more interesting, more pleasing to the eye, e.g. add some glitter, colour some parts in, add some items or cut out coloured paper that you might like to stick on etc.

Link: We have been looking at some pictures today, one that is just black and white and the other that we have added some colour and creativity to.

- I wonder which picture you prefer and why.
- How do you think comparing a plain photo and a colourful photo could be a bit like thinking about life with and without Jesus?
- Wouldn't you want everyone to be able to have the colourful photo instead of the plain one? Wouldn't you want everyone to do life with Jesus, not without Him?

Children's activity bag suggestions

Below are some suggestions for you to use in creating a childrens activity bag for use during the second half of the service. It would be good to hand these out to the children after the interactive message.

- **Palm branches of dough:** For this you will need either a small bag of playdough or paper Magiclay as well as either some green match sticks or green pipe cleaners cut into short pieces (e.g. four or five segments). Each child will have some dough and either match sticks or pipe cleaners for them to create a palm branch to remind them of the celebrations for Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Place all the items that the children will need, plus some instructions, into a small snaplock bag and place it into the activity bag.
 - 'The celebration starts today as people waved palm branches as Jesus came into Jerusalem. This was the start of the journey to make it possible for us to be connected with Him and be a part of His Kingdom.'
- **Party Hat Creations:** Each child will need a plain coloured party hat (you might even like to make some of your own out of plain white cardboard for them to decorate) and a range of stickers including some plain address label stickers for the children to draw on and then peel and stick to their party hat. Place all the items that the children will need as well as some instructions into a snaplock bag/brown paper bag and then place inside the childrens activity bag.
 - 'Party hats help to remind us about celebrations. Today we celebrate Jesus coming into Jerusalem and starting His journey. The journey to help make it possible for us to be a part of His kingdom, His party forever.'
- **I wonder...** Each child will need a blank sheet of paper and some drawing implements (depending on the age of the children you will want to provide appropriate drawing implements). They will also need some instructions that can be written or printed onto the paper or on a separate card that accompanies the paper. The 'I wonder' questions are very broad and children of all ages will be able to engage with this at the level that they are at. (One question for each side of the paper or give the children two sheets.)
 - I wonder what living in a world with Jesus looks like...
 - I wonder what living in a world without Jesus looks like...

- Other items to include:
 - Themed Kidzone for Palm Sunday (this will include puzzles and stories etc. for today's theme).
 - Home & Beyond card or swing tag for the family to continue the conversation at home.
 - Lollypop, sweets, shapes or something to eat depending on the children that you have, allergies and eating in church policies etc. This could also be done by having a container where the children can choose something to put into their bag when they collect it or making up the bags individually with names on them, thus catering for those with special needs, as well as having spares for visitors.
 - Invitations or fliers for the families for the family Easter celebrations.

Home & Beyond

It is vitally important, as leaders within our churches that we help to equip parents with suggestions, activities and language as they help their children to navigate on their spiritual journey. A Home & Beyond card placed in the activity bag or used as a swing tag on the activity bag is a great way to help them take the key message home and continue the conversation in the rhythm of their daily lives. Below you will see some suggestions that you might like to put on a tag to support, challenge and equip your families.

- **Invitations:** As a family it would be great to invite someone to come to church for one of your Easter activities/ services. Discuss together who you might like to invite and why. Think particularly about those who might not know what it is like to live a life with Jesus. (Make sure that in your discussions that you talk with your child about the importance of asking but that, sometimes, people might say 'no' and not be able to attend for a variety of reasons.)
- The children may have made some invitations at church or you might like to make one together as a family. Make sure when putting your invitation together that you include all the information that they will need, address, time, date, phone number, who will be there, what will you be doing etc.
- **Opposites:** Around the table, as a family, ask each person to share 'three things that make you feel happy, loved or full of joy' and why? When everyone has had their turn, you might like to think about what the opposite of this would be...what are three things that would make you feel unhappy, unloved and not full of joy?
 - **Link:** These two situations (doing an invitation and talking about your feelings) are very different, but they are both about inclusion, being wanted, being welcome, being loved and being accepted for who you are. What Jesus did at Easter, he did for everyone. He wants to be in everyone's life. God's plan is that no-one should do life without Jesus—everyone is welcome.