

Three Words of Truth: Save Us Now!

A sermon based on Matthew 21:1-11 – ***“As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”***

⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

***⁵ “Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”***

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

***“Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”
“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”***

¹⁰ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

¹¹ The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

It was rather odd, somewhat laughable, kind of depressing. In the NFL, a couple of years ago, one team, the Cleveland Browns went 0-16. They didn't win a game. And as sad as that was, what took place a week or so later was even sadder. Their fans threw a, what they called, “Perfect Season Parade.” Yep, thousands braved the frigid January temps of Cleveland to watch and participate in a parade celebrating their team's perfection...their perfection in being unable to win a football game that season.

That's not usually what you expect, is it? The team who wins the Super Bowl gets the parade. The nation who comes out victorious in a war is celebrated. We rejoice in triumphs, not defeats. And parades and celebrations, well, we usually associate those with coming after the victory and not before, right?

So you might understand our amazement that first Palm Sunday as we were making our way into Jerusalem and saw the entire way lined with a huge crowd, there to celebrate Jesus' arrival by throwing what looked like a parade.

For us disciples, though, the amazement extended beyond that. Of course, I could go on and on about miracle after miracle Jesus did, all of the wonderful preaching moments we disciples were privy to. But

even just that day, Palm Sunday, had started already at the Mount of Olives. Jesus, knowing everything and knowing what would take place, sent me and another disciple into the village to pick up his ride, which, mind you, Jesus didn't call ahead to reserve. He just knew a donkey with her colt would be there, all set for us to untie and bring to him. He even gave us exactly what we needed to say to assuage whoever might question two random strangers who appeared to be stealing someone's property.

So there was that. Then the actual welcome into Jerusalem, it was a parade fit for a king. I mean, the people were literally treating Jesus as a king. Riding on the colt of a donkey seems humble, but in the Old Testament times, kings would regularly ride donkeys. People laying their cloaks on the ground was an act of royal homage. Waving palm branches – these symbols of victory – often waved as a victorious king rode by. And then, their words, their song, **“Hosanna to the Son of David!”** “Son of David,” an obvious reference to the great King David, but it's that other word – hosanna – that sticks out every time I recount this event.

Do you know what it means? From the Hebrew language, Hosanna means, “Save us, please!” As you can maybe imagine, it's got this sense of pleading and this feeling of urgency. It was if these people were crying out to their king, “Save us, Jesus. Save us now!”

It was unforgettable... the sheer bliss of that day and of that glorious moment. But it was also unforgettable in the sense of us disciples, like you, now we see that day in the context of everything that took place during Holy Week. And what took place in the coming days was, well, not so glorious.

You can imagine the surprise of seeing some of those same faces in another crowd...on Good Friday, where the “Hosanna! Save us now!” had turned completely on its head to “Take him away! Get him out of our sight. Crucify him!” People who were so joyful in their singing, **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,”** completely changed their tune to “death” for this same man who came “in the name of the Lord.” Ironic. Sad. Pathetic.

And you might be tempted to sit there smugly, like, I would never turn on Jesus! I'll tell you, I was there, too. I joined my voice with the rest of the disciples on Maundy Thursday, pledging my allegiance to Jesus. I was ready to fight for him. I was ready to die for him, just like Peter. At least, I thought I was. I couldn't see myself ever possibly turning on Jesus.

By the end of the week, though, it wasn't only the crowd's mood which changed. By the end of the week, we disciples had abandoned Jesus to face his enemies alone and to die alone. Jesus was dead-on with his warning in Gethsemane, **“The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Matthew 26:41).**

So, again, if you're thinking, “I would never turn on Jesus like them,” listen again to what the crowd was chanting, “Hosanna to the Son of Son of David! Hosanna! Save us now!”

Now! That's almost a word of convenience, isn't it? In the moment, when they were overcome with joy and elation, maybe they were feeding off of each other and all the positive vibes in the air, they wanted Jesus and his salvation NOW! But Friday, they backtracked, changed their minds, “Oh no, Jesus, we don't want your saving. Not NOW!”

Have you ever said that? Do you ever think that?

You're listening to talk radio on the drive home, you're watching the nightly news before dinner, you're scrolling through the top stories on your phone – any of those – and you're not liking what you're seeing

or reading or hearing...at all. And the choice words you use to respond to that...you probably would say, "God, if you could tune out for a few seconds here. You're not going to want to hear what I have to say NOW."

You're with your loved one or by yourself, and what you choose to watch on that screen definitely isn't a shining example of morality, and you're thinking, "God, close your eyes. You're not going to like what I'm watching NOW."

Someone once told me what they would tell their kids, when they were misbehaving, is "What would Pastor think if he were standing here right NOW?" And maybe you've done something like that before, like, "How can I make sure Pastor doesn't hear what I'm talking about in my conversation downstairs after worship?" "What can I do to hide this on Facebook so Pastor won't see it?" But do you really want me to be the standard of is this ok or not? Shouldn't that be God? And, aren't you really saying, "God, what I'm doing right NOW, you wouldn't approve. I believe in you and live for you when it's convenient for me. But that's not right NOW. Don't be present NOW."

But he is. God is always in the room. God always sees what's playing on your computer or TV screen. God's always listening. Always.

But to have that mindset is no different from the person who says, "I'm going to do what I want right NOW because I can always repent later. I'll take Jesus' saving later." You tell me, is that the kind of attitude God wants his children to hold? Is that any different from this crowd, and how their shouts, "Hosanna! Save us now!" appeared to be void of true faith, especially with the 180 turn on Friday? Is that any different from Christianity today, which, by and large, for a lot of people seems to be a religion of convenience, "I'll be Christ-like when I want to and when it will be beneficial for me. But that's not right NOW!" Do you fall in with them sometimes?

If that's you and you're feeling guilty, like me, walk with me back to that dusty road leading into Jerusalem. Because, now, that hard, uncomfortable truth of our sinfulness causes us to join the crowds in pleading, "Hosanna! Save us now!"

And God's reply to "Hosanna"? It's Jesus.

Now, I'll admit, your English language doesn't quite catch it. To you, the name *Jesus* and the Hebrew word *Hosanna* sound completely unrelated, but in their original languages, they make beautiful harmony. Let me explain.

When the angel Gabriel first appeared to Mary to announce she would be the mother of the very Son of God, he also gave her God's command: "**You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins**" (Mt 1:21). "You will call him *Yeshua* (the Hebrew word for Joshua)," which literally means "the Lord saves."

Years later, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the cry "Hosanna" filled the air. Literally, it's *Hoshianna* - from the very same verb as Jesus' name. *Hoshianna*, which, again, means "save us now!"

So, friends, God's reply to *Hoshianna*, "save us now" was *Jeshua*, "he saves!"

No accident! The people may not have truly meant it when they said, "Hosanna! Jesus, save us now!" But God was serious when he sent Jesus, "he saves" into Jerusalem that day.

It's somewhat strange how Jesus was entering Jerusalem, which means "house of peace." I'll tell you from firsthand experience, by the end of that Passover festival week, the "house of peace" — Jerusalem—would be shaking with hatred and violence, the crowds nearly rioting and not stopping until this prophet from Nazareth in Galilee was captured, tortured, and, finally, executed. That's what lay at the end of the Palm Sunday road. No matter how lovely and joyful the procession was that afternoon—and it was, with colorful garments and pungent palms paving the way—at the end lay darkness and death.

And Jesus knew it. But Jesus also knew what he was here to do...save us now because the reality was there is no other way! Being the subject of such cruel anger and false accusations and mockery and physical abuse and death – in spite of being completely innocent, perfect even, that wasn't convenient for Jesus. Yet Jesus rode into Jerusalem, this "house of peace," knowing there would be no peace for him there...and he did that so he could walk out of Jerusalem to Calvary, carrying his cross, so, though his crucifixion and his resurrection, Jesus could bring true and lasting peace between you and God. Praise God!

And now, our response has to – it desperately wants to – echo the song of Palm Sunday, ***"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna to the Son of David!"***

There's a difference now, though. For to cry "Hosanna" to our King means to confess he's our only hope of salvation and without him we are eternally lost. To cry "Hosanna" to the King means to confess our sins and recognize the punishment they deserve, to abandon all hope of saving ourselves or finding some assurance of heaven in our good behavior. It means to come to him spiritually naked and poor and broken and to look to him for clothing and true wealth and healing. To cry "Hosanna" to the King in true faith means to come to him and plead, "Save me now! There is no other way!" And to cry "Hosanna" to the King is to know he has saved us through his life, death, and resurrection.

And we'll keep crying, "Hosanna!" because it's a fitting motto for the kingdom of Christ. "Save us now!" Right? Christ's kingdom is about one thing: salvation—eternal release from the bondage of sin to eternal life in indescribable bliss and joy. That's the goal of our faith in Christ: the eternal salvation of our souls.

And, so, if you want my advice from someone who was with Jesus as that Holy Week went on. Keep "Hosanna!" as your mantra throughout this week. It gets tough, no matter how many times you've sat in solemn reflection after Good Friday worship looking at that cross, no matter how many times you've tasted Jesus' body and blood on your lips, and know how that was given and poured out for you on the cross. It's tough.

It should be. Sin is serious. Your sin is serious. But that motto reminds us what this week is all about...God, in his serious love for you, made his Son endure the worst pain and suffering – unimaginable - to save you for this life and for life eternal. Remember that.

"Hoshianna! Save us now!" Yes, that's what our King Jesus—Yeshua—rides into Jerusalem to do. Yes, that's what the cross assures us he did do. Yes, that's what the empty Easter tomb guarantees he will also come back to do. That's what the King is all about. That's what the kingdom is all about...Hosanna! Save us, please. He does. Amen.

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