

---

**HOSANNA, SAVE US!**

Imagine yourself in a city besieged and held captive. Not hard to imagine now, is it? Do you know what they were excitedly shouting as Jesus came riding up to Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday oh so long ago?

- “Save us! Save us!” That’s what the word “Hosanna” means. “Lord, Save us!”
- Can you relate?

The people of Jerusalem were under the stranglehold of a foreign invader. Not a virus but the Romans. So when they saw Jesus riding in looking like a king on a mission, they excitedly shouted “Hosanna! Save us!”

That Palm Sunday parade was a type of intentional public theater. All cultures have this, public actions that carry symbolic messages that everyone in the culture understands.

- Jesus came riding in decked out in the symbols of a king.
- If the king was on a horse, it meant war. If on a donkey, the king was coming in peace.
- The prophet Zechariah had foretold how the Messiah would come, “Rejoice greatly, Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey.” (Two millennia later, Handel set it to music.)
- They saw. They rejoiced. They shouted, “Hosanna!”
- In this setting, hosanna is not really a pleading for help but a way of honoring the arrival of the king, like cheers of “You’re the one who can save us! Hosanna!”
- Laying the cloaks in the road before him. Waving the palm branches. These also were cultural symbols for what you did to honor the coming king.
- It was public theater, everybody knew what it meant, or they thought they did.

But what if a savior king came to town and he didn’t save you? At least, it didn’t seem like he did. At least, he didn’t save you from what you thought you wanted to be saved from. How would you feel about that? You probably wouldn’t like it; they sure didn’t.

- The people thought Jesus was coming to start a revolt against the Romans and free their country for life to go back to normal. But that’s not the kind of savior Jesus is.
- It broke Jesus’ heart that the people didn’t understand the real, deeper danger they were in, a danger worse even than the Romans.

A big family project this year for me and my siblings has been helping our Dad move to Assisted Living. I was helping clean out his garage and came across a reproduction of a famous old painting, Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. Jesus is on one hill, the Mount of Olives, looking over the valley to the city of Jerusalem up on the other side, and he’s weeping.

- When I saw it, I stopped what I was doing and stared. The pain captivated me.
- Did you know that scene is part of the Palm Sunday story?
- It seems fitting for our Palm Sunday celebration this year, Jesus weeping in the midst of it.

After all the excited hosanna shouting, Luke 19:41 says the Palm Sunday story continued this way, “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.”

“If you had only known...” Why do you think Jesus wept over the city that Palm Sunday?

- Maybe because the people didn’t understand what they really needed saving from?
- Maybe because the people thought what they needed was just to be saved from the Romans so they could be free to go back to their old ways, to their old sinful ways, back to their good old ways of injustice when they were the ones doing the oppressing, back to their happy-go-lucky ways of ignoring God’s words and warnings?
- They did not understand that their rejection of God and their sin had been their real problem all along.

Jesus loved the people so deeply, but they did not understand.

- Like they had once rejected God’s earlier prophets, they would now reject Jesus, too.
- In that holy week ahead, Jesus would suffer and even die for them, to win the forgiveness they so desperately needed.
- But even that, the very forgiveness of God, most of them would also reject, not understanding the foolishness of their choice and the suffering that would come their way because of it.
- So, Jesus wept.

You, too, might be keeping watch at your city gates wondering, “How do we know God loves us?” Proof can be found in Jesus’ tears.

- God can be still found where God has always been found, in His word. God’s Holy Word is how God finds us and we find God. This is still true.
- God can still be found in the believing church, which as Jesus says, is God’s delegated presence on earth, the body of Christ here and now.
- God is in each of you all as believers still united in faith as the body of Christ, reaching out to be there for one another as you can now, and reaching out to help others in Christ’s name being God’s presence to the world in this time of need.

I also have gotten unexpected calls of grace in these weeks, people from the congregation and the wider church, colleagues and friends. But who was that also on the phone or the Zoom with them? It was the presence and love of God coming to me and speaking through that person. Yes, God is still here and among us.

Holy Week is about to begin. The love, the suffering, the dying. But remember how it ends. Easter will still be there on the other side. We don’t when, we don’t know how long this “week” will be, but Easter is coming. Hosanna! Amen.