

## **“Hosanna!” – March 24, 2024**

### **Palm/Passion Sunday**

#### **Mark 11:7-10**

*7 Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. 8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. 9 Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna!*

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!*

*Hosanna in the highest heaven!”” (NRSVUE)*

Did you know “Good-bye” was originally a prayer, “God be with you”? “Hosanna” was a prayer or cry for divine help in Jesus’ time, meaning “Save, I pray!” “Save, I plead you!” In Christianity, it is also understood as a shout of praise, adoration, and a shout of jubilation. Thanks to the children and choir members, we waved the palm branches singing and shouting “Hosanna” this morning in this worship service.

Today is Palm Sunday. The final Sunday in Lent. And the Sunday before Easter. Whether it is a movie scene, a painting, or a story we heard in Sunday school when we were young, there are images that come to mind when we think of Palm Sunday, aren’t there?

Although Palm Sunday is often labeled as Jesus’ “triumphal entry,” Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was quite different from the procession of conquering kings or generals riding war horses, accompanied by a column of cavalry and soldiers. Near the Mount of Olives, which is the place where Jesus would soon be arrested, the disciples brought the colt to Jesus. When Jesus sat on the colt, heading towards Jerusalem, many people welcomed him—some throwing their coats on the road, others spreading leafy branches instead of a red carpet. Running ahead and following after, they were shouting, Hosanna!

Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest!

Unlike the expectations of many, Jesus was a humble king. He was not the triumphal king, but the king of the lost, the king of the oppressed, the king of those who were called unclean. They were poor, weak, broken, vulnerable. They were

Galileans and other Judeans, as well as Samaritans, Gentiles, and other social and religious groups who were discriminated against. They were called sinners in the Jewish purity system of Jesus' time.<sup>1</sup>

That's why Laurence Stookey, who taught worship at Wesley, said "the label 'triumphal entry' is a misnomer and a source of much misinterpretation."<sup>2</sup> If we understand Palm Sunday only as utterly joyous and victorious, we can easily miss that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was an important part of the thread that foreshadows his death on the cross.

Conscious of his impending death on the cross, Jesus knew that the crowds who were shouting Hosanna would leave him abandoned on the cross. In less than a week, when the crowds found that the Kingdom of God Jesus preached and lived out was different from their expectations, they started shouting "Crucify him!" When they found that Jesus was not the leader they expected, not the one who would say what they wanted to hear, and not the one who catered to their desires and needs, their hosannas quickly became, "Crucify him!"

Today's reading challenges us to contemplate the possibility that we, too, could be one of those in the crowd who shout, "Crucify him!" Are we the ones who keep singing Hosanna to Jesus or those standing on the other side and shouting "Crucify Him?" Palm Sunday always reminds us of the divide between the deep love of Jesus through his walk to the cross of love and the superficial shouts of our own Hosannas.

Aren't you often tempted to put your desires and expectations over God's will? This can be easily seen and experienced in our prayer patterns. We often think of prayer like a vending machine, expecting that if we ask for coffee through prayer, coffee will come out, and if we ask for green tea, green tea will come out. If the coffee or green tea we want doesn't come out, we complain that the machine is broken. Likewise, when we pray, we often feel satisfied or disappointed based on the outcome rather than by discerning God's will and trusting and being grateful for God's presence and guidance at every moment. In a more extreme way, when expectations about Jesus turned into disappointment, the people's "Hosanna" shouts became "Crucify him!"

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<sup>1</sup> *New Interpreter's Bible.*

<sup>2</sup> Laurence H. Stookey, *Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church.*

I don't complain, but yes, sometimes I am disappointed after praying. For example, when someone is sick, I pray for God's healing and comforting presence, and I'm grateful to be able to pray in that way. I believe that God understands our suffering and pain and heals us. At the same time, I confess I am disappointed when I see outcomes which are the opposite of what I prayed for. I still believe that God is the one who answers not according to what I want, but according to the way that is best in God's eyes. Jesus' earnest prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane becomes excellent guidance: "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want, but what you want."

Asking and desiring through prayer is a gift from God. Whether we want healing and wholeness, a happy family, financial stability, or growth in faith, our desires are a natural part of life. Let me share what I learned from Henri Nouwen when I began my ministry long years ago. These are some of his words:

Our bodies, our minds, our hearts, and our souls are full of desires – Some are unruly turbulent, and very distracting; some make us think deep thoughts and see great visions; some teach us how to love; and some keep us searching for God. Our desire for God is the desire that should guide all other desires. Otherwise, our bodies, minds, hearts, and souls become one another's enemies and our inner lives become chaotic, leading us to despair and self-destruction. Spiritual disciplines are not ways to eradicate all our desires but ways to order them so that they can serve one another and together serve God.<sup>3</sup>

Nouwen especially invites us to nurture the desire to pray. He said, "The more we pray—in the sense of living a prayerful life—the more we desire to pray. If we live a prayerful life, then there is a growing desire to spend more time with God and God alone."<sup>4</sup> If our desires are solely self-centered, metaphorically speaking, the "Hosanna" shouts of Sunday would soon fade and give way to Friday's calls for crucifixion.

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<sup>3</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing* (adapted).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Today's story reminds us that "faith is not built on cycles of hope and disappointment."<sup>5</sup> The power of God, which the crowds hoped to see in triumphant ways, would be revealed on the cross.

Every Palm Sunday, we enter Holy Week, which commemorates the final chapter of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. Starting from sunset of Holy Thursday to sunset Easter Day, we are especially invited to remember the passion, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is a record that the church in Jerusalem around the 4th century held the Holy Thursday Service in the Garden of Gethsemane and Good Friday Service at Golgotha during the Holy Week.

Jesus Christ, the lamb of God, broke the power of sin and released people from it through his suffering, death, and resurrection. As we enter Holy Week, I invite you to listen to part of Steve Garnas Homes's prayer poem, allowing yourself to shout "Hosanna" from your grateful and loving hearts.

"Hosanna... Even as our mouths cry out for triumph  
and our hands grasp for power and glory,  
they will not save us.  
Our hearts know this,  
even as they prepare to betray and deny:  
only love will save us.

Hosanna!

O Love, you who save us  
from all that we want,  
to you alone we give our hearts. Amen! (Steve Garnaas-Holmes, "Hosanna!" "O,  
Save!")

Palm Sunday and Holy Week are all about how much God loves us, each of us. I hope we can also shout, or say in silence, "I love you, God, too! I love you, Jesus my savior!" Amen!

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<sup>5</sup> *New Interpreter's Bible.*