

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Palm Sunday
February 24, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Hosanna!

¹As they approached Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, on the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and told them, “Go into the village ahead of you. As soon as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it, and he will send it back here without delay.’ ” ⁴They left and found a colt on the street, tied at a door; and they untied it. ⁵Some who were standing there asked them, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” ⁶The disciples answered them just as Jesus had instructed them, and the men let them go. ⁷They brought the colt to Jesus, threw their garments on it, and Jesus sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their garments on the road. Others spread branches that they had cut from the fields. ⁹Those who went in front and those who followed were crying out, Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!

—Mark 11:1-10

Hosanna! Blessed is he who came in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!

Hosanna is our jubilant cry on Palm Sunday. We have proclaimed it, sang it, and prayed it. So, the obvious question ought to be, what does it mean? Hosanna means “Please save us.” Hosanna is the crowd's cry that saw Jesus, the Messianic King. As they saw Jesus enter Jerusalem, perhaps not fully understanding their words, they cried out, “Hosanna!”

Today, on Palm Sunday, we cry out with an understanding of the depths of the phrase. Today, we cry out to Jesus, “Hosanna! Lord save us.”

Palm Sunday is a day that I hold near and dear to my heart. I love the palm procession as the kids join in on the crowd's actions, chanting, “Hosanna!” as they lay their palms before our king, Jesus. I love the jubilee, as we have such a wonderful beginning to such a solemn week.

The refrain, “Hosanna!” comes from Psalm 118. Psalm 118 is the song that the crowd proclaimed as Jesus entered Jerusalem as the triumphant yet humble king. Psalm 118 is a special psalm in that it is Messianic in nature, which means it prophesied about Jesus. Psalm 118 is also part of a group of psalms, Psalms 113-118, which are the Hallel Psalms. This simply means they are praise psalms. They praise the Lord who delivers his people.

The Hallel Psalms were used during the Passover celebration, which was done in remembrance of the LORD delivering his people from Egypt. Jewish believers would sing these Psalms at two special times during the Passover celebration. First, they would sing them during the slaughtering of the Passover lamb – what a cool connection to Jesus here! Second, they would sing them during the home celebrations of Passover day.

For thousands of years, believers sang “Hosanna!” as they awaited the Lord's fulfillment of his promise to give them ultimate deliverance from the bondage of sin, death, and the devil. On Palm Sunday, they sang “Hosanna!” as the Lord entered to deliver his people.

Brothers and sisters, today, as we see the Lord enter Jerusalem to deliver his people, we can sing “Hosanna!” because we see the real strength of our Lord as he comes to deliver his people humbly.

At the beginning of this section of Scripture, Jesus instructed two of his disciples to retrieve a colt. This colt would be a donkey upon which no one had ever ridden. Matthew added the detail that there would be a donkey with the colt. This is likely the mother and her colt. When the disciples would arrive there, Jesus told them that people would ask them why they were retrieving the donkeys. He told them to respond because the Lord needed it.

It is interesting to note that Jesus shared the information that the Lord needed the donkey. Sometimes, we simply see Jesus' riding in on a colt as an indication of his humility. Certainly, there is an aspect of that. Yet, the disciples were to tell these people that the Lord needed the donkey.

Jesus' riding into Jerusalem on a donkey was significant from the prophecies regarding the Messianic King. In the first lesson, we read about the promised King to Jerusalem. There, Zechariah wrote, "Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and brings salvation. He is humble and is riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9). Jesus was humbly riding on a donkey, yet this was also an indication that he was the Messianic King.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowd laid down their cloaks and palm branches. This action can also remind us of Jesus' role as Messianic King. In the Old Testament, there was a king named Jehu. When Jehu was pronounced king, the people placed their cloaks on the ground for him to walk upon.

Finally, the people cried out from Psalm 118. This included the phrase, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:9-10 quoting Psalm 118:25-26) In this song, the crowd proclaimed Jesus to be the Messianic King.

As people contemplate the pomp and circumstance of Palm Sunday, on the original day and in our remembrance of it, they may wonder if Jesus truly appears to be a king. Kings have real power, don't they? Kings enforce their will upon people. Do kings ride humbly? Do kings get arrested? Do kings wash feet? Do kings die among criminals? Today, we cry out to Jesus, "Hosanna! Please save us." But do we cry out to one who deserves to hear such things? Do we cry this out to one who has real strength?

On this day, the crowd cried out to Jesus as the Messianic king. While Jesus rode into town, they treated him like a king. Yet, just a few days later, these people no longer gave him glory, laud, and honor. Instead, they mocked, abandoned, and denied him. Did their treatment of Jesus change because they recognized that he was not truly powerful? Of course not! Perhaps, though, his strength was not what they wanted.

As we cry out, "Hosanna!" we are crying out to the one who truly has the strength to save us. As you contemplate the events of Holy Week, it may not appear to be the case. It may appear that Jesus had lost power. His adversaries arrested him. They created lies about him. They falsely condemned him. They put him to death. Although this may not appear to be all that powerful, this is where true strength was demonstrated. Jesus restrained himself. Jesus endured ultimate pain. Jesus had the real strength to go through the pain of Holy Week. He did this so he could answer the call of "Hosanna!"

What is a demonstration of real strength? Some of the most powerful people should be called "meek." We often misunderstand what meekness is. Meekness is not weakness; instead, it is power under control. Meekness is the ability to wield one's sword but the self-control to decide not to.

During Holy Week, Christ's passion is not weakness. Instead, it is meekness. Jesus has the real strength to control himself during such scenarios. He chose to do this so that he could fulfill the cry of "Hosanna!" During Holy Week, Jesus had the real strength to save.

Brothers and sisters, our world doesn't see Jesus' strength in Holy Week as true strength. Many people see a Savior dying on the cross as pathetic and not powerful. So, how do you see Christ's passion? Can you be embarrassed by such a Savior?

Perhaps that is not where you struggle to see Christ's real strength. Perhaps your struggle is seeing what he does as the ascended Lord. When children die of cancer, do you think of Jesus as impotent? When natural disasters strike, do you think of Jesus as really weak? When our culture continues to fall into depravity, do you think of Jesus as an imposter of a ruler?

Now, I know you would never say such a thing. You praise King Jesus. You sing "Hosanna!" But would you ever question Christ's strength deep down in your heart? We can all feel this temptation in our hearts, whether or not we will admit it. When we see these problems, when we see our God mocked and suffer, when all this happens, we may be tempted to doubt Christ's strength. Often, we can think of meekness as a weakness. Often, we want a god who shows his strength in huge actions.

Let us not question the strength of our God or doubt Christ's actions. When we do so, we show just how much our thinking has been affected by this sinful world. When we do so, we sin. Therefore, we need to confess and repent of this sin.

Jesus' meekness is his real power. The Father had a plan. Jesus knew he needed to follow it. From the fall into sin, God had promised that he would send his Son to be the sacrifice for the sins of the world. During Holy Week, Jesus resiliently carried through with this promise. Through his actions, Jesus demonstrated his real strength. Jesus had the strength to bear the sins of the whole world on the cross. In so doing, Jesus also forgave the sins of the whole world. In Jesus' meekness and real strength, you are forgiven. You are forgiven for questioning his strength. You are forgiven for all your sins. Because Jesus demonstrated real strength by dying on the cross, you know that you will live with him forever in heaven.

By the power of the Holy Spirit who has called us by the gospel, let us now praise and thank our Lord Jesus. As Jesus used his real strength during Holy Week to save us, that real strength is now at work among us. Jesus really strengthens us with his gifts through the Word and sacraments. Now we can proclaim, "Hosanna!" to our Lord.

People of Emmanuel, as we proclaim "Hosanna!" let our joyous cry to our king not simply end today. Let us proclaim the praises of our Lord Jesus throughout all our lives. Let us not just lay our cloaks and palm branches before him here and today. Let us do so through everything. We can praise Jesus as king at work, school, and throughout all our lives. We can praise Jesus as Lord in our words, thoughts, and prayers. Let us take this triumphal procession outside of these walls. Let us make known to all nations that salvation comes from our triumphant and humble King, Jesus.

So, how can we do this? Let's put some attainable goals forward. Let's have some goals to see how we can proclaim Jesus our Messianic Savior King this week. First, invite your friends and family to worship this King at Emmanuel on Easter Sunday. Second, attend the many worship opportunities to proclaim Jesus as our strong savior in his passion. Third, join in on serving your community through upcoming activities that connect them to Jesus the Savior King. Finally, honor him who was meek for you by exercising self-control in your life knowing that meekness is real strength. I encourage you to join in on any and all of these actions to herald Jesus as king.

Today, we enter the greatest week in human history. Jesus demonstrated real strength as he approached Holy Week to save us. We have forgiveness in Christ's passion. Now, let us be empowered to proclaim him as our Messianic King. I will say it again: "Hosanna in the highest!" Amen.

