

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Palm Sunday

April 10, 2022

Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz

***Sing Hosanna!***

*<sup>5</sup> Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. <sup>6</sup> Though he was by nature God,<sup>[b]</sup> he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed,<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>7</sup> but he emptied himself by taking the nature<sup>[d]</sup> of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man,<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

—Philippians 2:5-11

Little by little the crowd that accompanied Jesus from Galilee had been growing. In Jericho the entourage that followed Jesus along the road to Jerusalem began to grow even more. As the pilgrimage climbed the steep hill that led to Jerusalem the excitement in the crowd grew. We don't know how many people were with Jesus. There might have been only dozens but very possibly hundreds or more. It was, after all, the time of the Passover, and observant Jews from everywhere were making their way to Jerusalem. Jesus was known throughout Palestine and far beyond. People were touched by his teaching, amazed by his miracles. And now Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. The excitement reached a crescendo as the crowd crested the Mount of Olives. Jesus' disciples set him on a donkey. People spontaneously paved the dusty road ahead of Jesus with their cloaks and cut down palm branches to wave them in his honor. They cried out "Hosanna!" The word means "Save us!" It was a shout of praise reserved for none other than the Messiah; in shouting the word to Jesus the crowd was acknowledging Jesus as the Christ of God. In triumphal procession they followed Jesus down the Mount of Olives and into the holy city. You can sense the excitement, the electricity in the air, the anticipation of what this Jesus was about to do.

Did they know it would end at a cross? Did they know that this Jesus, royally acclaimed by the thrilling crowd on Palm Sunday, would end up betrayed, scorned and condemned, beaten and flogged, spit upon and cursed, and nailed to a cross?

The twelve disciples should have known. Jesus had told them very clearly, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise" (Mark 10:33,34). There was no hidden agenda. Jesus spoke plainly about these things, but the Twelve didn't understand it. They were still caught up in disputes about which of them was the greatest and who would sit at Jesus' right and Jesus' left in the kingdom of God. They didn't get it. The Palm Sunday crowds had lots of reasons they shouted "Hosanna!" and wanted Jesus to save them. Save us from the Romans! Deliver us from the oppressor! Restore the earthly throne of King David! "Hosanna!" "Save us!" "Make our lives better! Make us well fed and prosperous!" Many in the crowd who waved palm branches didn't get it, and we can't help but wonder if there were some who shouted "Hosanna!" on Sunday whose shouts turned to "Crucify!" on Friday.

We reflect on this phenomenon as if it were a strange thing, this desire to make Jesus a political king to save people from earthly problems. We rip on Jesus' admirers who called him Messiah but didn't know what the Messiah should be. We might say, "You should have known better! You should have listened more closely to what Jesus taught, that he came to save sinners, to seek and save the lost—not to establish heaven on earth."

But we do the same thing.

"Hosanna! Save us!" we sing. Save us from what? Save us from the next recession, from unemployment and poverty. Save us from our debt. Save us from the financial blunders we've made. Save us from inflation, from high prices at the gas pump and the grocery store. Save us from our illnesses. Save us from Covid and from cancer and from heart disease, improve our health, prolong our earthly lives. Save us from bad government, corrupt officials, wicked policy. Save us from terrorist attacks and from enemies foreign and domestic. Save us from being harassed at work or bullied on the playground. Save us so that our lives can be tolerable and stress-free. Save us so we can live our best life, and we can be healthy and happy and prosperous! "Hosanna! Save us!" because that's what we want, and that's often our picture of what it means to be your followers, Jesus.

Oh, come now, don't tell me you've never thought this way. I know I have. We might point out the fallacy of those who preach a "prosperity gospel," that if you just pray hard enough and have a strong enough faith God will give

you every material thing you ask for—and we know that’s not right—but deep down we ourselves crave the very prosperity they preach. So when our health fails, we cry out, “Why me, God?” When tragedy strikes, we complain, “Why me, God?” When we see someone else thriving, we say enviously, “Why not me, God?” “Hosanna! Save us!” Fix it all! Change the world! Make it better!

Jesus Christ our Lord and Master didn’t come to fix the world. He came to save the world.

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Yes, the Palm Sunday parade ended at a cross where the Messiah died, because that’s where it had to end. The fundamental problem that Jesus came to resolve goes a lot deeper than workplace harassment or playground bullying; than corrupt government and bad policy. It goes a lot deeper than war and brutality, genocide and destruction. Our fundamental problem is way more than paying our bills or staying fit and healthy. Our fundamental problem goes to who we are as human beings and what we’ve done. We are naturally corrupt to the core, and we have rebelled against our Maker. We have sinned, and it’s only a matter of time, only the ticking time clock of this life and this time of grace that we have, before left to themselves our sins will plunge us into the outer darkness of eternal condemnation. That’s the problem we need fixing. We need the forgiveness of our sins. We need reconciliation with God. We need God to see us not as sinners deserving of death but as redeemed children and as heirs of the gift of life, so that when the hourglass of this life runs out, we will stand before God in the judgment unashamed and free from guilt.*

That’s why Jesus entered Jerusalem on that donkey. He who is God from eternity humbled himself and made himself nothing. He took the form of a servant and became a human being. As our brother, clothed in human flesh, he obeyed God’s law and never sinned. He rode into Jerusalem to offer his sinless life on the altar of the cross, to suffer God’s eternal wrath against the sin of every sinner, and to pay my debt of sin with his holy, precious blood. Jesus rode into Jerusalem amid the shouts of “Hosanna!” to save us from the thing we most need saving from—God’s judgment for our sins. He bought the forgiveness of sins for you and peace with God.

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. It’s done! The debt is paid! Jesus accomplished on that cross everything he came to do. Every sin is forgiven. Jesus’ righteousness stands as the perfect substitute for the world’s wickedness. With his victory Jesus didn’t create heaven on earth, but he threw open the gates to heaven above for all people to come in. Trust in Jesus as your Savior! Fall on your knees before him and acclaim him as your Lord! He gives you forgiveness and eternal life. It’s a gift, the most precious gift of infinite worth, bought with the infinitely precious blood of our Savior.*

But what about all those other things we want from God—good health, good government, peace and prosperity and the like—can we ask for those things from Jesus too? Of course we can! We pray for those things regularly and fervently (we’re going to pray for those things here in church today). Those are all very noble requests, and Jesus himself tells us to place our requests before God. Any requests! And he promises to hear us. But there is one thing about these prayers that is very different: These are all “your will be done” requests. Whenever we pray for something earthly, physical, of this world, we pray “Your will be done” and trust that God will always do only what is best for us. Maybe God permits hardship or health problems or violence or tragedy or war or destruction or a host of other problems to touch our lives, but can any of these separate us from the love of God in Christ? “No! In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39). It’s about keeping the main thing the main thing.

Today we sing “Hosanna! Save us!” and Jesus does just that. Here is the most powerful revelation of God’s love for you: his love revealed in the anguish, the suffering, the torment and the death of his Son. Here grace is revealed. This is the ultimate proof that God loves you, that he came to save you, to justify you and reconcile you with God. “Hosanna! Save us!” Save us from our sins! Wash us in your blood because without your cleansing we have only our guilt. Save us, Jesus! Save us from the pit of hell because without you that’s all there is. Save us from our dark sins and from this dark world, fill us with your light of truth and take us to be with you in the light of heaven. Save us and give us new life with you now and new life with you forever!

There is no one else who can save us. No one else to whom we can cry “Hosanna!” there is only Jesus.

The crowds called out to Jesus, “Hosanna!” We call out to Jesus, “Hosanna! Save us!”

And Jesus saves us. That's what he did. That's why he came. Amen.