

SAVE US, LORD
Sermon for Palm Sunday, 2019
John 12:12-15

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the first part of our Gospel read before, John 12:12-15: ¹² **On the next day, the large crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.** ¹³ **They took branches of palm-trees, went out to meet Him and began to shout, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord!” and “the King of Israel!”**

¹⁴ **Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as Scripture has said: ¹⁵ “Stop being afraid, daughter of Zion! Look! Your King is coming, sitting on the colt of a donkey.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

When an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream regarding Mary’s miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit, he said to Joseph that Mary “*will give birth to a son, and you shall name Him ‘Jesus’! For He will save His people from their sins,*” (Matt. 1:21). The name Jesus means, “*The Lord saves.*”

Years later, on a Sunday morning, **the large crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.** ¹³ **They took branches of palm-trees, went out to meet Him and began to shout, “Hosanna!”** Hosanna is a Hebrew expression meaning “*save us, Lord!*”

How fitting was this shout, this cry, as our Saviour now rode into Jerusalem, as was foretold years earlier by the prophet Zechariah,¹ and now recorded by John, “**Stop being afraid, daughter of Zion! Look! Your King is coming, sitting on the colt of a donkey.**” This prophecy was now being fulfilled. The King of Zion (Jerusalem), the messianic King from David’s line, entered Jerusalem amid praise and glory.

As God, in His grace, has brought us once again to the beginning of Holy Week, let this same cry be found on our lips too: “**Hosanna!**” After all, there is no word more appropriate as a cry to a king, and a motto for a kingdom.

First, it’s a cry to a king.

On a Sunday in early spring, 30 AD, Jesus set out with His disciples from Bethany, a little village only about 4 kilometres from the temple, just on the ridge of the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. How strange that He was going to a city named Jerusalem, which means “*house of peace.*” By the end of this Passover festival week, the “*house of peace*” – Jerusalem - would be shaking with hatred and violence, with 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 - with garments spread on the road² and palms paving the way - at the end lay darkness and death.

Jesus knew what lay ahead, but His disciples were still in the dark, as was the excited crowd. All of them, catching sight of Herod’s temple with its solid gold-plated façade, was much too caught up in the excitement of the moment. Their heads were filled with happy, patriotic thoughts of celebrating Passover in the Holy City of God. It was a special time to celebrate their heritage. Even Jews around the world today often close their modern Passover celebrations with the longing prayer, “*Next year, in Jerusalem.*”

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, listen to the words the large crowd were singing: “**Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord!**” These words are from Psalm 118, a psalm that was one of the special Passover hymns, a psalm that reflected on the very first Passover and the miraculous deliverance from Egypt that God provided. What could be more appropriate? What could have been more traditional or more inspiring?

Nothing. Yet that’s exactly where we sense a bit of emptiness in the entire festive scene. By the end of the week, the

¹ Zechariah 9:9

² Matthew 21:8; Mark 11:8; Luke 19:36

crowd's mood will have changed. By the end of the week, the disciples will have abandoned Jesus to face His enemies alone and to die alone. The sad reality is that most in the crowd probably cried "**Hosanna!**" with their voices, but not with the voice of faith.

Is it really any different today? People will talk about their faith, but what is "faith"? What does it mean to be "religious"? How do we define "spiritual"? Sad to say, the prevailing attitude today is that *I* get to define what my faith is. *I* get to decide my personal beliefs and how I will express them in worship or in the way I live my life.

That type of thinking can even affect God's people too. Look right here in John's account of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. In one sense the cheering crowd had "faith," but it soon became apparent that week that for many people "faith" was only "custom," "tradition," "ritual," "observance." There were curiosity seekers in the crowd too - "Who is this?" - who perhaps also got swept up in the parade. For many, faith was crying at the King but not crying to the King.

A real problem here and in our world today is that people don't see that faith needs an object. It's not just a "feeling" or a "positive vibe." You don't just "believe"; you don't just "have faith"; you need to have faith in something or someone.

By God's grace, the Spirit has led you and me to put our faith in Christ. We believe in Christ - who He is and what He has done. We need always to remember that so that our faith doesn't become the faith of the Palm Sunday crowd. Holy Week is an excellent time to remind ourselves of that - with all our special worship services and special liturgies. We can't come to our Maundy Thursday service just because we like to see the altar stripped and the lights turned off - we can't come without realising what Christ instituted that night. We can't come to our Good Friday service just because we really like how we speak our liturgy instead of chanting it - we can't come without standing at the foot of the cross in fearful awe mixed with wonder and joy that God chose to do this for us. We can't come to Easter worship just because we *should* at least go to church on Easter - we can't come without understanding the power of Christ's resurrection. We must not join with the crowd shouting *at* the King, lest what God had said through Isaiah about His people of old becomes true of us: "*this people has been coming near Me with their mouths and has been honouring Me with their lips, while their hearts have been keeping far away from Me,*" (Is. 29:13). No. Do not come to cry "**Hosanna!**" *at* the King, but in true faith cry "**Hosanna!**" *to* the King.

There's a difference. To cry "**Hosanna!**" *to* the King means to confess that He is our only hope of salvation and that without Him we are eternally lost. To cry "**Hosanna!**" *to* the King means to confess our sins and recognise the punishment they deserve, to abandon all hope of saving ourselves or finding some assurance of heaven in our good behaviour. 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, Lord! There is no other way!*"

For those who, by God's grace, cry *to* the King in true faith, they are heard by Him. Psalm 3:4 says, "*With my voice I was calling to the LORD, and He answered me from His holy mountain.*" In David's day, the "holy mountain" was where the ark of the covenant was kept, on the future site of the temple. Now, however, God's holy mountain is Calvary. How loudly and clearly He answers us there when we cry to Him, "*Hosanna - save us, Lord!*" There on the cross hangs the answer for our problem of sin - the only answer there is. There hangs Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Then, He was crowned with thorns; now, He is now crowned with glory and honour. He rode into Jerusalem to go to that hill to die for us.

We cry to Him; we cry with our pains, our hurts, our confusion, our problems, our fears, and our doubts about His love for us, and His answer comes back time and again: "*I am your King.*" He's the proof of God's forgiveness and love. He's the proof that the Lord can help us. He's the proof that God *will* help, comfort and encourage us, strengthen us, and equip us for every good work. "*Blessed be the LORD! For He has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy,*" (Psalm 28:6).

Second, "**Hosanna!**" is a motto for a kingdom.

"**Hosanna!**" It's a cry to the King! But it's also a motto for His kingdom. John records that the crowd sang, "**Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord!**"

People and nations choose mottoes to reflect who they are and what they stand for. While our nation Australia does not have an official motto, "Advance Australia" was officially shown on the 1908 coat of arms. Queensland's motto is "Bold but Faithful." Many schools and other learning institutions also have mottos.

"**Hosanna!**" is a fitting motto for the kingdom of Christ. "*Save us, Lord!*" Christ's kingdom is about one thing: salvation - eternal release from the bondage of sin, and eternal life in indescribable bliss and joy. This is the goal of our faith in Christ: the eternal salvation of our souls. This is the reason Jesus is King and the reason He has brought us into His kingdom.

Yet who understood that on that Sunday Jesus rode into Jerusalem or during the rest of Holy Week? The crowd didn't. They thought Jesus had come in riding on **a young donkey** (as David had used donkeys as royal mounts) to set up a political dynasty. Israel would again be as great as it had been under David. Jesus would drive the Romans out. He would heal all their diseases. He would multiply five loaves of bread every day. He would bring world peace and prosperity. We know many in the crowd were expecting all that, because St. Mark's Gospel records that the crowd also shouted, "*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!*" (Mark 11:10). Jesus would say to Pilate later that week, "*My kingdom does not belong to this world,*" (John 18:36). No, His kingdom is about eternal salvation and not international peace treaties. His kingdom wasn't about winning against Rome but about winning over Romans - and Greeks - and Jews - and Gentiles all over the world to cry "**Hosanna!**" to the King in true faith.

Dear friends, as members of the kingdom - we will want to continue to focus on that. Christ has called each of us to preach "*the good news of the kingdom,*" (Luke 16:16) - that salvation is free and has already been won by Him. Everyone who believes will inherit an eternal kingdom in heaven. That is a beautiful and powerful motto to proclaim, a motto that gives true hope, true joy, and true peace to a world that so desperately needs these things.

So while others - yes, even some Christian churches - look for a golden-age Christian millennium here on earth, let us, especially this Holy Week, shout "**Hosanna!**" - the motto of the kingdom and proclaim with joy what John heard all heaven say in Revelation: "*Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*" (7:10).

"**Hosanna!**" "**Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord!**" Yes, our King Jesus, rode into Jerusalem for us. Yes, He died on the cross for us and rose three days later for us. The empty Easter tomb guarantees that He will also come back for us. That's what the King is all about. That's what the kingdom is all about. God bless your worship this Holy Week. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT (PALM SUNDAY)

Heavenly Father, we come into Your presence with thanksgiving and joy. You are a great God. You rule over the whole earth from the deepest seas to the highest hills. We bow down and worship You, for You are our Maker. We are the people You care for, and the flock for which You provide.

We thank and praise You especially that You have sent to us the living Word, Jesus Christ, Your Son. We praise You that He willingly accepted the disgrace of dying on the cross for us. Grant that we may keep our eyes fixed on Him, and may not grow weary in doing good, become discouraged, or murmur when we are chastened and corrected. Uplift us with the assurance that, as we share in Jesus' sufferings, so we shall also share in His resurrection to eternal life.

Save us, then, O Lord, not by any good deeds that we have done, but by Your mercy, through the new birth given in our baptism and the new life created by the Holy Spirit. Rescue us from all sin, and purify us to serve and praise You.

Put Your will into our minds, and write it into our hearts. Put Your song into our spirits, that we may proclaim with joy: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Give us the power to seek out those who are still strangers to Your salvation. Send workers to preach Your Word in truth, and to proclaim the name of Jesus as the only name under heaven through which people can be saved. Prosper the witness of all Your children throughout the world, that all may know You.

Give to this congregation, and to all who worship here, joy and energy as we serve You. Give us all willing minds and pure hearts that we may do our utmost to build and strengthen Your kingdom.

We pray for all who are burdened by sickness, sorrow, pain, anxiety, and fear of death. Be with them as they pass through troubled waters. Give them the faith that knows that You will deliver them in Your wisdom and love.

Lord, You are able to keep us from falling and to bring us faultless and joyful before Your glorious presence. To You, the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority, in all ages past, and now, and for ever and ever! Amen.

PALM SUNDAY

Deuteronomy 32:36-39

³⁶ “For the LORD will vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their strength has gone away and that no one is left, either anyone imprisoned or anyone free.

³⁷ “Then He will ask: ‘Where are their gods, the rock in which they have taken refuge, ³⁸ who used to eat the fat of their sacrifices and used to drink the wine of their drink offerings?’ Let them rise and help you! Let them be your refuge!

³⁹ “See now, that I, even I, am He and that there is no god besides Me. I shall kill, and I shall make alive. I have wounded and I Myself shall heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand.

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Have the same attitude as Christ Jesus had! ⁶ Although He was in the form of God, yet He did not consider His equality with God as a prize to exploit. ⁷ Instead, He emptied Himself, took on the form of a slave and became like other human beings; and, when He was found in the appearance of a human being, ⁸ He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹ That is why God also has very highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every other name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus everyone in heaven and on earth and under the earth may kneel, ¹¹ and that everyone may confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

John 12:12-19

¹² On the next day, the large crowd that had come for the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took branches of palm-trees, went out to meet Him and began to shout, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord!” and “the King of Israel!”

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as Scripture has said: ¹⁵ “Stop being afraid, daughter of Zion! Look! Your King is coming, sitting on the colt of a donkey.”

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first,

but, when Jesus had been glorified, they remembered that these things had been written about Him and that they had done these things to Him. ¹⁷ Therefore, the crowd that had been with Him when He had called Lazarus out of the tomb and had raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸ This was also a reason why the crowd went to meet Him, that they heard that He had performed this miraculous sign. ¹⁹ Therefore, the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are not achieving anything. Look! The world has gone after Him.”