

*Hosanna!*

March 20, 2016 Luke 19:28-10

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Hosanna! Hosanna, in the highest. Words, phrases that those of us who have been in the church a while, recognize and associate with Holy Week, and perhaps with communion services. Hosanna: the shouts of the crowd that greeted Jesus as he entered Jerusalem on a donkey at the beginning of that fateful week that would end in his death. Hosanna! That week that begins today, Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week.

But if you were a careful listener today, perhaps you recognized that you didn't actually hear that word "hosanna" in our readings. In fact you didn't hear any mention of palms, either. Well, the psalm did tell us to bind the festal procession with branches. Those COULD of course be palm branches. But that was the psalm, not the gospel, not Luke's telling of the parade entering Jerusalem with Jesus on a donkey. We are missing both the palms AND the hosannas today!

So what's up? Well, this is one of those great examples where we conflate our bible stories from different sources into one story. Actually, Luke is the only writer who does NOT use the word 'hosanna' in telling the triumphal entry tale. Matthew, Mark, and John all claim the crowds shouted Hosanna! And what exactly does hosanna mean? This is one of those strange words whose etymology is actually rather simple. There really isn't an English equivalent, or a Greek equivalent. No. Hosanna is just another one of those Hebrew words/phrases that has no easy translation into Greek or English. And guess what? We DID hear it today. In our psalm. You may have missed it. Verse 25. Save us, we beseech you, Lord! Save us: Hosanna!

Yes. Hosanna means 'save us!' Over the centuries, the meaning of this word has shifted to a shout of praise and acclaim. But the one place we find it in the bible, in this psalm, it is a plea for help, for salvation. And I wonder if perhaps Luke's version of Jesus' riding into Jerusalem isn't the perfect version for us in this modern age. Luke's version that lacks Hosanna. Luke's telling that omits the cry for help, for salvation.

Because I really wonder how many of us would line the streets of Downers Grove, waving tree branches and throwing our coats on the crowd, begging for salvation, begging to be saved. Because to beg to be saved, to shout Hosanna, there must be something we need saving from. We must feel threat, we must recognize our own lack of sufficiency, we must be able to admit that we cannot do it on our own, that we are not in total control, that we do not hold the answers and solutions to our lives, that we are lost.

And I think that in our western world, in our white normative place in society, in our affluence and power in the world, we have a very hard time admitting need. Or that we need to be saved from anything, that we are lost. We would be so embarrassed to have the rest of the world hear us beg, hear our pleas, see first hand that our lives are a mess, that we have left the driver's seat of our own lives, unsure and unaware of where we are heading.

For Jesus' friends, there would be no embarrassment calling out their need. They knew clearly what they needed. Or did they? What they wanted was political freedom. What they longed for was to be out from under the control of the oppressor. Right now, it was Rome. but in their long history as the chosen people, they had lived under other oppressors as well; the Egyptians, the Babylonians. Their scriptures had promised them salvation generation after generation. Prophet after prophet assured them that God had plans for them; wonderful plans, plans for good and not for harm. Yes, those on the road to Jerusalem with Jesus this day knew where their need lay. Or did they?

Because while they longed for a political messiah, for a messiah of might and power, what they got was this guy riding on a colt, dragging his feet in the dirt as he wound his way into the city. And like us, they didn't get it; even given the strong visual hints Jesus was showing them. If they had opened their hearts to what their eyes were seeing, they might have caught on. But they were blinded by their own wants, but their expectations of a different kind of messiah.

On Wednesday afternoons I often use this children's story bible with the Club Luke kids. This week as I read today's story to them, I was struck by the clarity the author gave to Jesus' parade of entry into Jerusalem. So I want you to hear it, too. Listen to this version of Palm Sunday: (*read from story bible*)....

When I read that, I think that maybe there is a point of intersection between Jesus' friends and us. They thought they knew exactly what they needed; of course they were wrong. We think we don't need a thing. And of course, we are wrong. Jesus' followers were looking for an army general to settle the score and set the record straight. We aren't looking for anything. And yet, deeper reflection tells us both then and now, we need to be saved. We need to shout Hosanna!

Little Sara Jo's mother brought her to church today and said Hosanna for her. Her god parents and her grandparents, and the rest of us gathered here also shouted Hosanna for her. Save us, Lord. Save Sara Jo, save her family, save us all indeed. And for some reason that all seems to make sense to us for our children. We want them to be part of the church family, we want to seal them into the Body of Christ. We recognize that they need Christ, and the church.

But my fear is we grow up, and somehow we lose sight that we continue to have those same needs. That Hosanna should be our daily prayer. We grow up and become so self-sufficient, we forget all that was promised to us in baptism. We forget whose we are. We don't want to answer to anyone or anything other than our own needs, wants and desires. We don't want to need a king, let alone a savior. At least not here and now in this life. As the internet meme proclaims; when science discovers the center of the universe, a lot of people are going to be disappointed they're not it!

So why do I think we might want to shout hosanna? From what might we need to be saved? Well, save us from our self-centered approach to life and to church. Save us from our judgmental tendencies that are quick to condemn others and slow to offer grace. Save us from our isolation and lack of authentically vulnerable relationships. Save us from thinking we know it all or that we are always right. Save us from talking so much before we listen. Save us from thinking our security lies in bank accounts and big jobs. Save us from our lack of trust and confidence in others. I guess we might be able to sum it all up with a simple 'save us from ourselves.'

Because when we let Jesus be the kind of king that God intended, when we let him ride the donkey of humble love and submission rather than the stallion of conflict of aggression, we open our lives to him in ways that allow him to work and transform us. We are able to live in love rather than in fear. We are able to recognize God's presence in our lives, in the valleys as well on the mountaintops. We grasp the freedom, true freedom, that only comes in surrender, in recognizing our need to be saved. So make Hosanna your daily prayer. Save us, Lord. Indeed! Save us from ourselves. Hosanna! Amen.