

WAVE THE PALMS, HAIL THE KING    A SERMON FOR PALM SUNDAY  
MARCH 29, 2015  
First Presbyterian Church of Marianna  
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JOHN 12:12-16

Once in a while, we'll use the word "Hosanna!" sometimes besides on Palm Sunday. But did you know, the only time the word is used in the New Testament is in the Palm Sunday stories? And even then, it is only used in Matthew, Mark and John. Somehow, Luke manages to avoid using the word.

Luke tells us that the whole multitude of disciples on that Palm Sunday began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty acts of God that they had seen. And that they cried out, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:37-38)

That sounds like what Luke tells us the angels sang at the birth of Jesus, doesn't it? Remember? "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace..." (Luke 2:14)

There's a marvelous symmetry there, because what Jesus came to do in His life, in His ministry is coming to an end, and just as King Herod the Great tried to have Jesus killed when He first entered this world, so another King Herod will be part of the plot to put him to death after He entered the city of Jerusalem.

Matthew in his account tells us that as Jesus entered the city, the crowds went before Him and shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And Matthew also tells us that all the city was stirred up by this and asked, "Who is this?" And the crowds answered, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee." (Matthew 21:8-11)

Mark tells us that they crowds cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!" (11:10)

And of course, you heard what John had to say. "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel!" (12:13)

"Hosanna" is one of those words that took on a meaning that might be quite different from what the word actually meant. It really means "Save us, we beseech thee".

You can find the word only as many times in the Old Testament as it is used in the New.

Most prominently, in Psalm 118:25, we can read, "Save us, we beseech thee, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech thee, give us success!" (RSV) If we don't translate "Hosanna", the verse reads, "Hosanna, O Lord, Hosanna!"

The story behind that psalm is an interesting one. It is part of the Hallel. In the back-story, a pilgrim who has been rejected is now recognized to be a righteous man. He enters the temple to thank God for God's goodness, and is greeted by the priests as coming in the name of the Lord. Verse 25 is that pilgrim's response, as he seeks even greater help and success from God. (See *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Volume 2, p. 648*).

This was a familiar hymn to the Israelites, for it was sung in the liturgy for the Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths, once a day for six days, and seven times on the seventh day, by the priests as they marched around the altar. And as they marched, the congregation waved branches of myrtle, willow, and palm.

Thus, if someone saw palm branches waving, to burst into song, to sing, "Hosanna, Lord, Hosanna"! was not inappropriate. They knew the story of the pilgrim, and the ritual of the temple during the annual festival. And even if they were going to Jerusalem for the Passover, they were still on a pilgrimage.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem as a pilgrim. He reverses the role of the pilgrim in the Psalm, for He comes being hailed as the one who comes in the name of the Lord, and is then despised, rejected, and finally crucified, dead and buried.

It appears that by the time that Jesus came to Jerusalem the word "Hosanna" had become connected with the messianic hopes of the people. The man coming in the name of the Lord, the son of David, is understood to be the Messiah who is coming to save the people, and when Jesus arrives, riding on a donkey, according to the messianic prophecy of Zechariah (9:9), the connection becomes complete. Wave the palms! Hail the King!

Now some have speculated that they expected Jesus to ride that donkey right up the steps of Herod's palace, and boot that usurper from the throne, and restore the monarchy of David. Ride on King Jesus! Wave the palms, hail the king!

Some have speculated that they expected Jesus to ride that donkey right up to the palace of the Procurator of Judea, Pontius Pilate, and tell him to take his Roman legions, his taxes, his tax collectors and be gone! Ride on, King Jesus! Wave the palms, hail the king!

Some have speculated that the people were disappointed. That what Jesus did, going to the temple, praying, looking around, was anti-climactic, was a let down. They wanted to see victory! They wanted to see blood shed! They wanted to see not just a triumphal entry into the city, they wanted to see triumph over their enemies, their oppressors.

Well, if they hung around all week, and they did, they would see victory. Not the victory they anticipated, with the Romans losing and the Jews winning, but a victory over sin and death.

And they would see blood shed. Not the blood of the oppressors, Herod's guards and Pilate's soldiers, but the blood of Jesus, shed for the remission of their sins.

And Jesus triumphed over their enemies, Satan and death, and over their oppressors, sin.

And the prayer they offered, which was just a word to them, like "Hallelujah," or "Hooray" or "Whoopee" to us, was answered.

"Hosanna!" Save us, we beseech thee, O Lord. By the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross they were saved from their sins.

Dear hearts, His death saved you and me just as well.

Someday, someone is going to ask you when you were saved. A lot of people will tell you when they accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, when they recognized that Jesus had died for their sins.

The truth is we were all saved at the same time. We were all saved about three o'clock on a Friday afternoon. It was the Friday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox. And it got strangely dark that afternoon. And the veil in the temple was rent, ripped, torn, from top to bottom. And the thunder rolled and the lightning flashed, and on a hill, three cross stood tall. And on the one in the middle, the Son of God hung and bled and died for the sins of the world.

Hosanna! Save us, Lord, we beseech thee!

And He did.

Let us pray.

O Lord, we thank you that we can say, "Hosanna" today, and know that you have saved us by your death upon the cross for our sins, and for the sins of all the world. Help us to live for you, as you have died for us. In your precious name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

