

Hosanna Is Not Enough

Sermon for Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023

Readings: Matthew 21:1-11; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 27:11-54; Psalm 31:9-16

Sermon text: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

The crowd shouted Hosanna! What does that mean? I looked up the meaning of Hosanna and here is what I found:

Hosanna is often thought of as a declaration of praise, similar to *hallelujah*, but it is actually a plea for salvation. The Hebrew root words are found in [Psalm 118:25](#), which says, "Save us, we pray, O LORD!" (ESV). The Hebrew words *yasha* ("deliver, save") and *anna* ("beg, beseech") combine to form the word that, in English, is "hosanna." Literally, *hosanna* means "I beg you to save!" or "please deliver us!"

Thank you internet (and the site gotquestions.org).

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on this day almost two thousand years ago he was acclaimed as messiah and heard the people cry out Hosanna! Save us!

They were crying out for a hero to save them from the oppressive rule of the Romans, a new David to become their king, defeat their enemies and reestablish Jerusalem as the capital of a significant earthly kingdom. They wanted freedom, they wanted power, they wanted vengeance. They wanted a warrior king who would get them all these things.

The people wanted to be saved, but not in the way that God intends us to be saved—through faith in Christ and trusting in the power of love.

The people wanted an outside force—in the person of one sent by God—to save them. But God saves us through the inside force of the Holy Spirit working through the generations.

The people wanted to be saved right away—what do we want, salvation! when do we want it, now!—but God has a slower plan.

That plan, it seems to me, starts with redemption, not salvation. Redemption is the freeing of a slave by one who purchases their freedom. A price, or ransom, is paid, and the enslaved goes free—saved from slavery, true enough, but still bound in the coils of mortality, in the dilemmas of free choice, in the need for

continuing work and struggle. The redeemed slave is returned to the people as a free person, but not translated to heaven as a perfect self.

None will be saved like that. No heaven sent savior will conquer all evil, make us all good, establish an everlasting throne on earth—at least not until Jesus returns at the last day. So let us stop looking for such a one—for a warrior king, for singular genius, for a technical fix, for an easy way to happiness, for a wonder worker to heal us of all ills. An altar call is not enough. Growing in holiness is the work of lifetime; growing in justice is the long struggle of history.

Hosanna is not enough. In fact it is a trap, set by the evil one, who wants us to be trapped into thinking salvation comes from the outside in. This is the lesson of Palm Sunday turning into Passion Sunday, the story of how quickly—within a week!—the people turned against Jesus, the supposed savior, the so-called messiah. Thrilled to sing Hosanna, elated for a day, they were easily manipulated into turning against him. Jesus refused to play the part of a warrior king. He simply taught in the Temple, debating with the Pharisees, not challenging the Romans. The enemies of Jesus spread rumors, they accused him of blasphemy, they plotted against him, they paid off Judas, who seems to also have expected a more militant leader, fighting messiah. So after he was arrested, in the dark of night, it looked like he was not such a savior after all—he couldn't even save himself. Not a king, except ironically. Is he not your king? asked Pilate—we have no king but Caesar, they replied—thus committing the blasphemy against the King of the Universe they accused Jesus of committing by calling God Father. Not a victor but a victim, not a winner but a loser. And no one likes a loser. We want a hero. We want to cheer. Or else boo. If he is not our savior, he must become our sacrifice.

The passion of the crowd—quick to turn— is not the passion of Christ—steadfast even to death. His death on the cross was not a defeat—as the world would learn later. He showed himself as victor on Easter, but only to a few—and they were to act as leaven, as seed for the kingdom, not lead a conquering war.

But, though he did not ride into Jerusalem this Sunday those many years ago in order to immediately save the world, all of us can thank Jesus for offering his life as a ransom for many. For freeing us from the bondage of sin, free now to love and learn. This is the work of cross, the work of redemption—part of it—another part, the overcoming of death and Satan I will talk about next Sunday when we look at the word Alleluia.

Meanwhile reflect on the gift of redemption, not salvation. This is none other than the gift, or offer, of freedom, if we will take it. If we will let the gospel story transform our mind, so that we are no longer conformed to the world and its

prisons of body and mind, as Paul put it one of his letters. Or as Bob Marley put it well in his Redemption Song (which has been in my mind since hearing it performed in the Apology for the Church's Complicity in Slavery Liturgy in the cathedral a little over a week ago): "Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery, None but ourselves can free our minds."

Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have:
Redemption songs,
Redemption songs,
Redemption songs.

Let the people say, Amen.

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