

## **Hosanna**

Menno Mennonite Church

Palm Sunday: April 5, 2020

**Purpose:** To connect us to the crossroads of following Jesus

**Message:** We are invited to follow Jesus into something new.

**Scripture:** Matthew 21:1-11a

Matthew 21 1-11 New International Version (NIV)

21 As they approached Jerusalem  
and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives,

Jesus sent two disciples,

2 saying to them, “

Go to the village ahead of you,  
and at once you will find a donkey tied there,  
with her colt by her.

Untie them and bring them to me.

3 If anyone says anything to you,  
say that the Lord needs them,  
and he will send them right away.”

4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 “Say to Daughter Zion,

‘See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.

7 They brought the donkey and the colt  
and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.

8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road,  
while others cut branches from the trees  
and spread them on the road.

9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,  
“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem,  
the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

11 The crowds answered,

“This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Everyone loves a good parade. There is something downright Mom and Apple Pie about it—a community coming together to celebrate the occasions of pride and hope. It is a way to speak with one voice about what is important to them.

I grew up in a small town which, in retrospect, could be a middle-american version of the fictional town of Mayberry. Sure it had its problems—firmly rooted in the post-industrial trials of the rust belt. But by in large it was a pretty good place to grow up: safe streets, places to get into the right sort of “children will be children” sorts of trouble without the world falling in too badly on anyone’s heads.

It is a place of rituals, year in and year out. There is the annual grudge match football game between the Orrville Red Riders and the Wooster Generals. These are the two cities of the area with a long and storied rivalry between them. The run up to this highlight of the football season was a big deal. This is Northeast Ohio where football is king, the be all to end all. It is routine for hospitals to put tiny footballs and pom poms into the basinetts to welcome new babies into the world. The whole week leading up to the game is basically written off as a lost cause academically as traditions and preparations are under way. Then comes Thursday night. A giant pep rally is held and the marching band leads the football players and cheerleaders riding in trucks through the town to the downtown square. Hanging there by a noose would be an effigy of the hated general, and after some short speech making about the opponent, the figure is cut down and paraded back to the school grounds in grand fashion where the figurative enemy would be the guest of honor for a number of more “go get ’em boys” sort of speeches from the coaches and the general dummy was given some more insults before becoming fuel for the 30 foot bonfire the local fire department had erected for the occasion.

I didn’t think about this all that much as a kid. It’s what you do, after all, tradition beyond though. In retrospect the ritual burning and hanging of any human form is not all that tasteful thing ever. It strikes me how weird this is. Take away the propriety of tradition and school spirit, and what would you have? It would be a riot, brass band or no. A mob of students marches on the town, blocks a state highway to abuse a human form that is later burned in ritual fashion. I bet that would draw some attention and not in a good way. Think armed response. Everyone loves a parade. Nobody loves a protest.

This is true now. And it is equally true in Jesus' time. Today we celebrate the pay off of the long journey to Jerusalem: the triumphal entry of Jesus marching into the city of cities to inaugurate what was about to be. Palm Sunday serves to memorialize what can sometimes be seen as the people finally getting it and recognizing Christ for who he was and what he was offering. As the gospel writer take great pains to remind us, all of this was happening to fulfill prophetic witness and the hope for a Messiah was very present. No doubt there were a few whose aspirations of a conquering hero ran high in these days, seeing the possibility of a coming messiah and the salvation from the boot of Rome at long last. How we want to be part of the crowds praising the entering Christ and shouting Hosanna—a word which has been given a meaning of blessing to a coming hero, placing the proper identity and function to the arriving Christ. We want to be part of the adoring crowd, heralding the coming of a new king. Hosanna! Glory to God in the Highest!

Yet even as we shout Hosanna, we fail to grasp the full meaning of these words. For us this is a term of adoration and praise—the adoration of the one who we love rejoicing in the Lord. Yet there is a fuller message is a much more important meaning. As is so often the case, the Hebrew roots that are hybridized to make Hosanna actually carry the meaning of “Deliver us we beg” in the most literal translation. So just as much as this was a parade to hail the coming of new leader, it was also one in which the expectations of the waiting crowd were also palpably present.

The crowds are expecting something very particular—salvation from their immediate circumstances. As Jesus ride the lowly animal through the streets as a hero, he is being presented with cries for action, surrounded by the pleas of a hurting and expectant population. The crowds see an opportunity to be given what they want, to be the successful persons and nation that they have been promised through a covenant with YHWH God. Jesus made it very clear what sort of salvation he was offering, and it was not the “power by any means” muscular spiritual and foreign policy that people understood. Instead it was the Kingdom of God, the way of love, and the means of peace which was being offered. With this sort of context to the riotous parade of the entry, is there little wonder why by the end of the week these same voices may well be crying “crucify”?

We, too, have a sense of longing in our cries of Hosanna, of Lord save us, to be heard. “Hosanna,” we cry, “Lord Save us, we are scared and suffering. We do not know where

all of this goes, and where all this ends. God, save us.” “Life is not turning out the way I envisioned; Hosanna.” “Hosanna, we sometimes find it difficult to love our neighbors.” “Our country, our culture lives in pervasive fear; Hosanna, Lord save us.” “Hosanna, let there be peace on Earth.” Hosanna. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Indeed, these cries, and so many more, are constantly on our lips, holding our most innate hopes and fears to the one who hears all prayers. We cry out to a God who hears our prayers, who grieves with us, who works within us to bring about the redemption that is promised to the world through the model of Christ. How we long for the calls to God for salvation to be realized in the ways that we would prefer, in those ways which would realize the kingdom in exactly the ways in that we imagine the kingdom ought to be. To wake up and find it was nothing more than a dream. We would much rather move from this day of parade to the day of resurrection, walking from the cries of Hosanna to those of Hallelujah without contemplating the cost which is brought about the hope of a new community and new reality—bearing even the unbearable for the sake of each one of us. Our calls of Hosanna are met with a call that Jesus gave so many times: if you would come after me, pick up the cross and follow. Dare we do such a thing, especially when we know often far too well what it might just cost us? Can we in our wildest hope step out in faith, trusting a resurrecting God will meet us in the world come what may? Especially in a world we may not really recognize any more?

Jesus precedes to the temple, to the place of sacrifice, the place of conflict because his call as the servant of YHWH compelled him to keep going. Knowing what Jesus knew, we can but imagine the impulse that had to have been there to turn away, to dismount and to send the crowds away telling them that they have the wrong person, or that is just not how this is going to go down. The way of Jesus, the way to the temple and the cataclysmic climax of his ministry is the way of service realized in the path of discipleship. Jesus knew the cost of the way that he traveled, and stayed on that road that we might know the true way of the kingdom of God, that hope arises from the most hopeless situations, that the way of true service and giving love are the way of the new kingdom, not the way of military might and political power. Jesus came to the crossroads, and remained faithful. And it is this choice of faithful following that heals us all.

This march of the Palms is a march into the shadow of what is to come, but also a march toward the hopeful dawn around the corner. This is a celebration of the kingly coronation of a new way that holds no cost too high, no chasm too deep, and no reality so irredeemable as to be

beyond the loving action of God to redeem this needy, wanting world, in need of salvation of every type. We walk the way of the Kingdom and God working through us, granting new life and new growth when we need it most. This is the revolution of these days.

We might be looking for the parade of power. What we are given is the chosen path of love.

May we each find our call, our part, and our home on the road with God that changed the world, and rebuilds it still, whatever the cost might be, finding even when we least expect the grace to follow the parade of home.