

2021 03 28 – Hosanna

Mark 11:1-11 (The Inclusive Bible)

Then the children gathered, singing
shouts of laughter, bursting cheer;
in the streets their song was ringing,
“Hosannas” filled the morning air.

VU 124 He Came Riding on a Donkey

These words, sung earlier this morning, describe a scene of celebration: children and their parents singing, shouting, laughing and cheering. It reminds me of the parade that the Raptors had two years ago when they won the NBA Championship or the inauguration celebration for Barack Obama back in 2009, or those heady days back in the early 1990's when the Blue Jays won the World Series two years in a row. These were joy-filled times, times of victory and glory.

But it is important to realize that the crowd attending Jesus' parade 2000 years ago were not celebrating a victory. The words that they were shouting were not hallelujahs or “We the North!” They were instead cries for help. “Hosanna” is a Greek word meaning “save us.” The pilgrims in Jerusalem were looking to Jesus as their saviour. The news of Jesus' teaching and healing had spread throughout Galilee and Judea and they believed that this radical rabbi could help them. There was hope and expectation in their cheers.

But what were they hoping to be saved from? What help were they seeking? Were they sick and wanting to be physically healed? Jesus had shown himself to be a successful healer. There probably were some in that crowd that needed his healing touch. But it's hard to imagine that everyone surrounding Jesus was

sick. There is no evidence that a plague or pandemic existed in those days. Not like today. We are living in the time of COVID-19, a time when variants of the virus are bringing about a third wave of illness and death. The Hosanna's ringing out around the world on this day could easily be prayers for healing, for safety, for immunity from a very modern plague.

Is it possible that the people in Jerusalem were asking for forgiveness, for mercy, for a right relationship with their God? Jesus was also known to give absolution on behalf of his Abba God. Were they looking for a spiritual healing? It's possible. There are many ways that we can turn away and estrange ourselves from the Ground of our Being. The people of Jesus' day believed that following the laws of Moses would keep them in right relationship with their God. When they strayed, when they broke the rules, they feared for their souls.

What keeps you from connecting with your God at a deep level? Do you feel a need for forgiveness? Do you find yourself avoiding your feelings altogether? Many of us are masters at avoidance. We use alcohol, drugs, food, TV, social media, even work to avoid dealing with our own personal demons. Many of us, including me, could do with a little help in this part of our lives. We could do with some spiritual healing.

Spiritual and physical healing are both very personal and very real reasons to ask for help, but today's scripture reading suggests another type of salvation. In it we read,

And everyone around Jesus, in front and in back of him cried out,
“Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God!
Blessed is the coming reign of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest!”

The people in the crowd weren't just looking for a healing rabbi, they were looking for a Messiah, a King, someone who would overthrow the oppressive Roman Empire that currently ruled in their country. They were looking for a successor to the most successful monarch in their history: King David. They were looking for a better life. They wanted to be saved from high taxes, subsistence living and virtual slavery to the rich.

In 2021, we could add many current issues to that list. In today's world we are looking to our provincial, national and world leaders for solutions to poverty, racism, misogyny, climate change, unemployment, and, of course, global pandemics. In a democratic society, every few years we get to choose a new leader, someone we can look to for help and for change.

So as we wave our palm branches today and sing our own “Hosannas,” it is important to remember that we are, in fact, crying “save us,” that we are asking for help. And, no matter what kind of saving we are talking about—physical, spiritual or political—we all have a role to play in that saving process.

Anyone who has gone through a twelve-step program, radiation or chemo, or the dark night of the soul, will tell you that healing isn't easy. In order to heal we often have to let go, to feel even sicker, to reach rock bottom, to face our demons directly, before we can truly be saved.

In this time of COVID-19 we all know that being saved from a pandemic means following restrictive rules that isolate us from our family and friends. It means staying at home when we would rather be shopping, watching a Broncos game or listening to a concert. It means not being able to celebrate weddings, funerals, anniversaries and birthdays with our friends. . It means closing businesses and creating a financial crisis. It means wearing an uncomfortable mask to keep ourselves and others safe.

And, if we are talking about political salvation, if we're talking about working towards God's reign of peace and justice, then waving our palms and asking to be saved can actually be a subversive act. We live in a culture that rewards those who strive for power, wealth and fame. If we are working towards a society built on justice and mutuality, then we are working against the culture in which we live. Steve Garnass-Holmes put it this way:

Friend, don't get sentimental about this.
To wave our palms is to rebel.
There is a king already,
who does not take kindly to this upstart.

There is an empire already,
the dominion of Self,
the kingdom of the habitual, the popular,
the Dominant Culture.

To wave your palm is to pledge allegiance
to a different realm, to take a different way—
not just during this parade
but every moment, every choice of your life.

You will pay for it.
To bless the Humble One is to risk his fate.
To cry this Hosanna is to take up your cross.

Don't wave that palm
unless you mean to resist,
and you're ready to be labeled subversive,
and to be punished for it.

If you do
cry out:
Hosanna—save us!
Hosanna in the highest heaven.
<https://www.unfoldinglight.net/>

The crowds cried Hosanna to Jesus because they knew that he was different,
that his power came from the Essence of Love, the Ground of our Being, from
YHWH, from God. We have access to that same power, that same Love. So let
us use that power within us. Let us find the strength and the courage to join
Jesus in the streets, to do our part in saving ourselves and the world, to wave our
palms and sing “Hosanna.”

So be it. Amen.