

Matthew 21:8-11 *So Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."*

"Jesus." "Hosanna." "Jesus." "Hosanna." Did you catch that? Those words sound a lot alike, don't they? Well, no, not really. Not in English anyways, but if I were speaking in Hebrew, you might have noticed the similarity since they both come from the same word.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to take Mary as his wife and what to name the boy, he said: "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). Call Him Jesus, he said. And in Hebrew, he said, "Call Him YeHOSHua," which literally means "the Lord saves."

Years later, as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the cry of "Hosanna" filled the air. Which in Hebrew sounds like HOSHianna—from the very same verb as Jesus' name. Hoshianna, which literally means "sav, I pray!" So now you can see the similarity, "YeHOSHua," "HOSHianna," "YeHOSHua," "HOSHianna."

The two words are very closely related, and so it is very fitting that as the man given the name meaning, "The LORD Saves" rode into Jerusalem that Sunday, the crowd called out to Him saying, "Save, I pray!"

This Lenten season in our Wednesday evening Lenten services, we've been looking at three word phrases that come up throughout the Passion history of our Lord. Each time, they are "Three Words of Truth" that tell us a great deal about our Savior. And so we are continuing with that theme this morning with the Three Words of Truth that come from that word Hosanna: **"Save, I Pray!"**

May we continue to call out in this way to our Savior God, "Save, I Pray, Hosanna!" There is no word more appropriate:

- 1. 1. It's a cry to a king.**
- 2. 2. It's a motto for a kingdom.**

1. It's a cry to a king.

We can almost pinpoint the very day: A Sunday in early spring, 30 a.d., Jesus set out with his disciples from Bethany, a little village only about 3 miles from the temple, just on the ridge of the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem. How strange that he was going to a city named Jerusalem, which means "house of peace." By the end of this Passover festival week, the "house of peace"—Jerusalem—would be shaking with hatred and violence, the crowds nearly rioting and not stopping until this prophet from Nazareth in Galilee was captured, tortured, and, finally, executed. That's what lay at the end of the Palm Sunday road. No matter how lovely and joyful the procession was that afternoon—with colorful garments and pungent

palms paving the way—at the end lay darkness and death.

And Jesus knew it. But his disciples were still in the dark, as was the excited crowd. All of them, catching sight of Herod's temple with its solid gold-plated façade, were much too caught up in the excitement of the moment. Their heads were filled with happy, patriotic thoughts of celebrating Passover in the Holy City of God. It was a special time to celebrate their heritage. Passover is the high point of the Jewish calendar, and Jerusalem is the happiest place on earth for Jews—the city of God. There could be no better place to spend the celebration. Even Jews around the world today often close their modern Passover celebrations with the longing prayer, “Next year, in Jerusalem.”

And the words they were singing! “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” — from Psalm 118, a psalm that was one of the special Passover hymns, a psalm that reflected on the very first Passover and the miraculous deliverance from Egypt that God provided. What words could be more appropriate for this scene? There they were at the entrance of the Passover, celebrating the victory God had won in Egypt, and here comes the Passover King! They are singing the Passover Song, shouting Hosanna, “Save, I pray,” to the one who had come to save them! This was the perfect moment, one you would never have forgotten had you been there.

But that's exactly where we sense a bit of emptiness in the entire festive scene. By the end of the week, the crowd's mood will have changed. By the end of the week, the disciples will have abandoned Jesus to face his enemies alone and to die alone. The sad reality is that most in the crowd probably cried “Hosanna” with their voices but not with the voice of faith. Instead, many might have been simply caught up in the moment. For many in the crowd, they were crying “Hosanna” *at* the king, but not necessarily *to* the king. It was all surface level.

Is it really any different today? There is so much talk about “faith” in this country. Just about everybody claims to have “faith.” But what is “faith”? What does it mean to be “religious”? How do you define “spiritual”? Sad to say, the prevailing attitude today is that *I* get to define what my faith is. *I* get to decide my personal beliefs and how I will express them in worship or in the way I live my life.

How often do we do the same, getting caught up in the tradition, the routine, getting caught up in the ritual of it all, but we fail to think about it as much more than that. Perhaps we sometimes go to church, or watch the service online, say our table prayers, read family devotion just because we feel like we're supposed to, or because we feel guilty if we don't—but maybe we aren't even necessarily thinking about how important these things truly are. Maybe we sing our hymns and pray our prayers *AT* God, but maybe not always *TO* God.

Yes, sometimes we might arrive at the high point of our week, when we are gathered with fellow Christians around the word of God, but then perhaps we just think of it as another part of our week—just another thing to get out of the way; part of the old routine. May God grant that our faith doesn't become the faith of the Palm Sunday Crowd. Lord, give us a faith that doesn't just sing along and participate in church because that's what's expected, but that does

so because what Jesus came to do is the most important moment in each of our lives.

Holy Week is an excellent time to remind ourselves of the importance of Christ's work—as we have all our special worship services and special liturgies and special decorations of the church. We can't just look forward to Good Friday service just because we really like the service of darkness or the somber note of the service—we can't come to that service without standing at the foot of the cross in fearful awe mixed with wonder and joy that God chose to do this for us. We can't celebrate Easter in worship just because we feel like we should at least go to church on Easter or because we like all the extra singing—we can't come without understanding the power of Christ's resurrection, and the promises he guarantees to us through His victorious resurrection. We must not join with the crowd shouting *at* the King, lest what God said through Isaiah about his people of old becomes true of us: "These people . . . honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isa 29:13). No. Do not come to cry "Hosanna" *at* the King, but in true faith cry "Hosanna" *to* the King.

There's a difference. For to cry "Hosanna" *to* the King means to confess that he is your only hope of salvation and that without him you are eternally lost. To cry "Hosanna" *to* the King means to confess our sins and recognize the punishment they deserve, to abandon all hope of saving ourselves or finding some assurance of heaven in our good behavior. It means to come to him spiritually naked and poor and broken and to look to him for clothing and true wealth and healing. To cry "Hosanna" *to* the King in true faith means to come to him and plead, "Save me, I pray! There is no other way!"

And those who, by God's grace, cry *to* the King in true faith are heard by him. "I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain," Psalm 3:4 says. In David's day the "holy mountain" was where the ark of the covenant was kept, on the future site of the temple. But now God's holy mountain is Calvary. How loudly and clearly he answers us there when we cry to him, "Hosanna—save us!" There on the cross hangs the answer for our problem of sin—the only answer there is. There He cries, "It is finished!" All of your sins—past, present, and future—completely accounted for and paid for in full. There hangs Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Crowned with thorns yes, but crowned with glory and honor.

And so we cry to him; we cry with our pains, our hurts, our confusion, our problems, our fears, our doubts about his love for us. And his answer comes back time and again: I am your King. He's the proof of God's forgiveness and love. He's the proof that the Lord can help you. He's the proof that God *will* help you, comfort you, encourage you, strengthen you, and equip you for every good work. We can say with the Psalmist, "Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy" (Ps 28:6).

2. It's a motto for a kingdom.

"Hosanna!" It's a cry to the King! But it's also a motto for his kingdom. Matthew records that the crowd sang, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

People and nations choose mottoes to reflect who they are and what they stand for. Think

of America's motto: *E pluribus unum*, "Out of many, one." It points to the many states and peoples that join together to be one nation. It's a fitting motto for our particular country.

Well, "Hosanna!" is likewise a fitting motto for the kingdom of Christ. "Save, I pray!" Christ's kingdom is about one thing: salvation—eternal release from the bondage of sin, eternal life in indescribable bliss and joy. This is the goal of our faith in Christ: the eternal salvation of our souls. This is the reason he is King and the reason he has brought us into his kingdom.

But who understood that on Palm Sunday or during the rest of Holy Week? The crowd didn't. They thought Jesus had come in riding on a donkey to set up a political dynasty. They thought this meant that Israel would again be as great as it had been under David. Jesus would drive the Romans out. He would heal their diseases. He would multiply five loaves of bread every day. He would bring worldly peace and prosperity. We know many in the crowd were expecting all that, because St. Mark's gospel records that the crowd also shouted, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" (Mk 11:10).

But Jesus would say to Pilate later that week, "My kingdom is from another place" (Jn 18:36). No, his kingdom is not about international peace treaties but eternal salvation and eternal peace with God. His kingdom wasn't about winning against Rome but about winning over Romans—and Greeks—and Jews—and Gentiles all over the world to cry "Hosanna!" to the King in true faith.

Sometimes we might lose sight of these things, lose sight of what God's Kingdom is all about. Sometimes we might instead come to church because of family or friends, or perhaps we come to church simply because it's part of the routine. And if that's the case, well then days like today when we all have to worship from home are a lot tougher, because today we wouldn't be getting what we're looking for. So instead of that, let's keep the cry of "Hosanna" on our lips. Let's keep that as our motto for why we go to church, why we watch service videos on YouTube. "Hosanna! Save us, we pray!"

Jesus' ride into Jerusalem assures us that's exactly what he came to do. That's what His Kingdom is all about, saving you. And if that's your motto, then you will never be disappointed, even when your Sunday Worship is spent looking at a video on your phone. Crying out "Hosanna, Save me, Jesus!" even with these less than ideal circumstances—you are getting exactly that!

This week, as we prepare our hearts for Good Friday and then Easter, let's keep the cry of Hosanna on our hearts. Crying out from the grief of our sin, crying out "Save me, I pray!" And crying out looking to the King who has come, with iron will and steady resolve, because He would not be turned away. He came to save you, and save you He did. Thanks be to God. Amen.