

Hosanna in the Highest

Rev. Taek Kim

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ² and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” ⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” ¹¹ Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

I’ve been in more parades in the past year than ever before in my life. In fact, the parades I usually partake in have been Memorial Day Parades down Monroe St in Carleton with the Carleton VFW and VFW Auxiliary, as well as Homecoming parades when my children were a part of it. We cheered and supported various parades down our street, from those that were traditional parades such as during Christmas as well as the first protests we witnessed in our 9 years in Carleton, as our family supported and cheered those who held Black Lives Matter and other signs as they were escorted by our Carleton Police Chief Johnson, who made sure they knew they were supported. In the past 12 months I have participated more special parades than in many years previous combined. They were parades for church members and friends of church members and our Carleton community for birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, and other special occasions. We’d make signs, cards, gifts, and of course cheers from inside our cars.

It wasn’t until after not only weeks and months, but a year has past that interactions and fellowship are not only greatly wanted and sought out, but we have come to know that community and connection are needed.

There were reasons for people to gather near and in Jerusalem when Jesus was given an amazing parade as he rode a donkey towards Jerusalem. One was of course Jesus himself. Wherever Jesus went, and people heard about it, crowds would gather because they heard of his powers to heal, feed large crowds, perform miracles, and of course for his powerful, transformative, and life-giving teachings that were unlike anything they had heard before. Another reason there was a crowd of people was because it was near the time of Passover when Jews remembered their liberation from the rule of and bondage of slavery to the Egyptians, recounting the how God saved them, including when death was to come to all the firstborns, and the Jews were told to put lamb’s blood on their doorframes so that their firstborns would be spared, the angel of death passing over their homes. That is why the annual time of remembering, gathering and sharing a special meal is called the Passover.

So the crowd was also looking for liberation, shouting with praise and celebration, “Hosanna in the highest!” They were shouting out for the salvation they were seeking on earth from the Roman

Empire. And they felt it was time for that prophesy would be fulfilled; hosanna meaning “save us,” and “in the highest” speaking of God.

No doubt there were crowds of people who riled up by the religious leaders who wanted Jesus dead. Jesus was turning things upside down in respects to authority; interpreting God’s Word with sensible and applicable meanings to ministered to all, especially those considered by many as sinful in their eyes, too sinful for God to forgive and love; he reinterpreted the rules and commands which Jesus said he came not to abolish but fulfill; by saying he was the Son of God, that he was equating himself to God, another reason they wanted him dead; and because so many were following him, including some of the religious leaders, they wanted him gone. Many of the religious leaders were afraid of what they were losing, as well as having the threat of being punished by the Romans who did not want to have another king rise up and lead a rebellion. We find later that when Pilate questions Jesus and finds out that Jesus is not a king that wants to lead a rebellion or even have anything to do with overthrowing the Roman occupation and rule on earth as Israel’s king, Pilate wants to release Jesus with no reason to have him executed.

So why did people throw a parade, and why were the religious leaders so afraid of the crowd’s reactions to Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey. Let us look again and more closely at the words the people shouted in such excitement, hope, and joy:

“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

We can look back at the Old Testament and see how several verses recall these words and speak to a promised savior. One is from Psalm 118:25-26: “Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. Another is from Zechariah 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

In the gospel of John, chapter 12, verse 13, it reads, “They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the king of Israel!”” Jesus riding a donkey was one reason they went bonkers. They knew the prophesy from Zechariah 9:9. They saw Jesus’ act of riding on the donkey as him making it known to all that he was that prophesied king. And so they cried out, “Blessed is the king of Israel!” And that created such fear in the religious leaders since their power and authority was being threatened as the Romans would not put up with that kind of rhetoric and proclamation.

These were cheers that everyone who knew the prophecies remembered and understood, and embraced even more since they were under rule and occupation again by the Roman Empire. And no doubt the religious leaders understood the shouts of hosanna, save us, and blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David. In the gospel of Luke, chapter 19, verses 39-40 we read, "Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

For us, having the ability to read about what had happened with interpretation and explanations within the Bible, understand why Jesus did what he did. No one understood, not even the disciples who Jesus

told what was to unfold and that he had to die. It wasn't until he rose from the dead and appeared to them several times with various ways to show he was not a ghost that they believed.

Then their praises mean more than for a king who they thought would save them militaristically. Their praise, worship, proclamation, witness and testimonies were about the fulfilment of prophecy that was about the salvation of people's very souls.

However, after Jesus was arrested, and again with the help of those opposed to Jesus bringing together many who would cry out for Jesus' death, sadly the shout of praise for a savior-king, "Hosanna in the highest!" turn into cries of death by Friday with the word and sentence of "Crucify!" Their cries before Pilate were louder than the cries that Jesus was innocent and should be set free.

There was surely confusion, including with the disciples, of why Jesus allowed himself to be arrested, or why he was arrested and tried at all. Not only would an earthly king not allow himself to be captured, nor stop his followers from fighting and preventing it, but also why would one so powerful, who could calm storms, feed thousands with barely enough to feed a small group, who walked on water and raised the dead, and who was undeniably of God if not the Son of God allow himself to be captured and tried? It would make one wonder if he was not truly who they thought he was supposed to be, showed himself to be, even claim to be.

Though our faith is founded on the Good News that Jesus lived, died, and rose again so that we could have eternal life, there are feelings of sadness and disappointment that people experience when events in life move them to question God and God's ways. Lack of understanding, misunderstanding, or at the same time the witnessing or experiencing things that are all too understandable bring people to a place of questioning their faith in God and even the existence of God.

Just as the people who shouted "Hosanna!" were disappointed when they realized Jesus wasn't going to be who they thought or wanted Jesus to be, it is easy for us to be disappointed in God when we don't experience life and God as we expect or want. Jesus was the king they needed, not necessarily what they wanted or knew they needed.

We also deal with things in life that are not seen so clearly as the events of Christ that we can look back upon, read, and understand. We are left at times with no explanation or reasons in life for why things happen as they do. Yet, because of what Christ did, we know we can trust in him when we cannot figure things out at times in life. When we face trials, tribulations, pains, and loss. Fortunately, though we do not understand what happens in life that shake our faith, we can have hope in the promises of Christ in life and in death.

Just as the disciples of Christ experienced with their ups and downs, they grew so much in faith that they came to a place, being filled with the Holy Spirit, that they lived more by faith, loving obedience, and the willingness to die for Christ that freed them to fully live for God.

Jesus taught them with his words of wisdom, his acts of love and compassion, his fervor for ministering to those in need and marginalized, and his commands that helped his disciples remember and commune with him. We will revisit more fully during this Holy Week, on Maundy Thursday, remembering the last supper Jesus had with his disciples before he died, the gift he gave them of the sacrament of Communion. We also remember the new commandment, for which maundy stands for, commandment that is. After Jesus showed them by washing their feet how they are to humbly serve one another, he

tells them, “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35, Revised Standard Version)

It was on that Thursday night Judas betrayed Jesus to be arrested, and on the next day to be tried and crucified on Good Friday, good meaning holy.

So here we are today, Palm Sunday and the last week of Lent, journeying through the last days of Christ that quickly goes from a parade celebrating Jesus as their promised savior and king to the cries on Friday for him to be sentenced to death by a humiliating and horrible crucifixion.

It's important to journey with Christ through these days as closely as possible with the reading of Scriptures, prayer, fasting as you feel called and are able, in serving and giving to those who are in need, and any other way God leads you to walk with Christ. In doing so, we will be able to celebrate with greater joy, gratefulness, honor, praise, and all the feelings and expressions of what it is to celebrate our risen Savior on Easter Sunday!

It's easy to want to skip to the happy ending when there's sadness, pain, tragedy and loss. Resist glossing over what Christ did for you. Resist looking away when you know it was for your sins he died. Do not simply look to your risen Savior, but also take time to remember what he did on the cross for you out of love so great that he gave his life in order to save yours.

Then you will have a greater celebration in participating in a parade that more fully understands as those do from the past and those who are celebrating all over the earth and all throughout heaven. Amen.

This Week's Prayer Requests:

- Betty Duby who was hospitalized with an infection and was found to have COVID.
- Marlene Gooch's son, Tim, and his family who all have COVID and he is not doing well in the hospital, also having pne
- Continued prayers for Nancy Stone who is now at Forestview Assisted Living Center in Brownstown.
- The 10 shooting victims in Boulder, Colorado, that included one police officer.