

Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Luke 19:28-40

Hosanna or Crucify

Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna, Hosanna! Save us Jesus! Just for a moment one might wonder whether we are on the streets leading into Jerusalem with Palm branches waving in the air, with people smiling and laughing as they place their cloaks on the ground as the one float parade goes by. Jesus rides by and what are the people so excited about? This is Jesus- the one who turned water to wine, enabled a blind man to see, and raised Lazarus to life! This is Jesus riding on a donkey- no big limousines, or chariots for this king of Kings. A donkey. And what are the people doing- shouting Hosanna! Because this is Jesus, the Son of God the Messiah the One God sent to save His people.

Yet here I am and there you are- me- in my house; You in your home=den, office, dining or living room. Separated by distance, walls and concrete, many metres and miles apart. And what are we singing today? What are we shouting? Hosanna Save us! We know and believe that the One who rode the donkey died on the cross to save us. But over 2000 years later are we still searching to be saved. Do we not understand Jesus' purpose on earth long ago and our responsibility to teach others His message of forgiveness?

We are living in unprecedented times- the world is told to stay home. Stay safe. Stay well. Separate yourself from others, self isolate and be careful and only go out when necessary. The freedom we had to shop when we want and how is no longer available for your safety and health.

We started this Lenten journey of 40 days not including Sundays a few weeks ago. We recounted that this Lenten time was set to remember Jesus' experience in the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil and where he fasted and prayed. What was Jesus doing? He was preparing himself for death and what God had sent him to earth to do. Jesus was given out of love to the people of the world in order that all would believe in Him as Saviour and all would then reconcile with God.

In several discussions this week, I've been asked do you think that God is up to something with this COVID19 affecting so many people in the world? Do you think this quarantine/40 days of Lent has something to do with when we will be ok again? I've also been asked- do you think God is angry at the world and this is what caused all this? And even do you

think that the world has turned so far away from God's teachings that God is punishing us as he wants to turn back to him? And even, does shouting Hosanna to God make a difference?

In the circumstances we find ourselves right now- God is certainly up to something. The church looks at Holy Week from Palm Sunday to Easter as the big week to remember Jesus who is the focus of our faith in God and the means by which we receive forgiveness of sins. Yet churches are closed because of medical officers of health have ordered closures to prevent the spread of disease. The timing of this self-isolation and quarantine for many is linked to Lent this year because of when this virus hit people returning for holidays around the world, March Break and as the last days of winter wane. Does God get angry and this is why this is occurring? Or did we as people do something so wrong that we are all being punished? Will singing Hosanna really save us? My simple answer is yes and no to all of these. God has been up to something since the time of creation. God has loved us for who we are but there have been times in our history when we have turned from God. We are people whom God created with the ability to think and feel and to reason and make decisions. And for many people this time of self-isolation is a way to reflect upon our lives. What are the things we deem important, what makes us joyful and how do we share this joy with others? In this quarantine/Lenten time maybe we are being asked by God to look inwardly to stop and figure out are we in need of saving from our normal selves? Maybe just maybe we need a Saviour to help us through this. Maybe Jesus in his wilderness experience of being tempted has shown us that no matter what he is with us even as he prepared himself for death. He knew that he would die for the sake of others, but do we know that all of us living in this moment right now are included, too?

From what do we need saving? And how does one man riding a donkey bring about salvation into the world? Salvation is defined as the deliverance from the power and effects of sin. The people of Jesus' time were oppressed, had little hope and lived day to day knowing that life was difficult. They had heard about Jesus who taught and healed people and even brought one man to life. And so when the news spread that Jesus was going to Jerusalem, they gathered together, shouted in the streets and were so glad because they believed him to be the Messiah, the one who would save them from the oppressions they endured. They thought he would overpower the emperor and the government but his power was even stronger than this- Jesus would reign as king of all kingdoms. So they shouted Hosanna.

The world and its people are grieving- the loss of routine, the loss of wages, work and perceived freedom. There are thousands who have died and if projections hold true we are gearing up for much more loss in our community, province and country. We are hoping that

people will listen to the medical directors and government leaders are saying and to stay home. This situation is not going to end tomorrow or next week. We need to stop and pray and lament knowing that God truly loves us. We pray that God will hear us and save us as we seek answers and ask questions about our lives and our futures. We need to cry Hosanna! This is one of the meanings of this word. The people were pleading for help Just as we seek help in the current situation our world is facing. But we are also grateful to those who are helping us- and aiding us as we stay home.

From Psalm 118:25 we might interpret this 'hosanna' as "Please, Lord save us. Please give us success. But in verse 26, there is a shift from concern to confidence "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

The difference in the meaning comes from the shift between the old and new testament understandings. We might find ourselves experiencing both meanings- one is not better than the other but merely to different places. Right now we are crying out to God for help, and we are very grateful to God for what has been done. But no matter what, we are in a better position, as a result. Cry out for help vs thanking God for what has been done for us.

As we reflect on Jesus' trek into Jerusalem we must remember that he is going very slowly, people are seeing him as they stop their working and they hear the crowds shouting. Many would not know who he is but those who follow him will tell the message that needs to be shared. He is Jesus, the Promised One, the Messiah and he is preparing to save them all. There were many who did not know him, yet many more who put their lives into his trusting care. They knew that their lives mattered to him that sins would be forgiven, that they were given hope when they did not receive it before.

Maybe you are in this position? You know a little about Jesus? You might even go along with the crowd and shout Hosanna because you want to praise Him for what he has done to help others and maybe you are asking for God to intervene and save us from further losses and grief.

Or maybe you are in a position where you see Jesus riding into Jerusalem and pleading that he should not go because he will die. Jesus' purpose on earth was to live, to die and rise again—for our sakes. And instead of seeing Jesus as the one who was to die on a cross for us, you see Jesus obedient to His Father and fulfilling the prophecies as the One in whom all people should entrust their lives. But what follows that triumphal entry into Jerusalem

On this Palm Sunday we also hear the stories of Jesus' life just prior to his death we realize how quickly the people changed their thinking about Jesus. Those who had witnessed miracles wanted to be saved but in the eyes of the leadership of the time, he was dividing the people and needed to be killed. Yet the people remembered him and hoped he would bring about change to the world and their loyalties and lives were divided—they believed him to be the Son of God but how could He really save them?

As followers of Jesus, we know what occurs later that week. He shares the Passover meal his disciples. He institutes what we call the Sacrament of Holy Communion and he prays. We can pray and offer to God our thoughts, concerns and thanks. And no matter where we are in this spectrum, from "save me" to offering Praise and Adoration we can all approach God through prayer or worship. When we are at that place of feeling like we are failing or like we can't go on, we can plead with God, "Please, hear me! Please, talk to me. Please, show me something new." For you are Christ and I believe- help my unbelief. And if we are feeling connected with God and feel like we are overflowing with love and blessings we can shout praises: "Thank you, God! You are so good! Thank you for this life! Thank you for making a way for all of us!" Hosanna. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

PRAYER:

God of grace and love, we offer to you our prayers of Hosanna- save us, thank you. Help us to rejoice and know that the road of Calvary which Jesus walked is where we need to walk to pray and to know Jesus again in our hearts. Help us to see Him and to put our faith in him. We ask this as we look to you in faith and with hope. Amen.