

**Palm Sunday – March 25, 2018**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

*Mark 11:1-10 NIV*

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 2) saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 3) If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" 4) They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, 5) some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" 6) They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. 7) When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. 8) Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9) Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" 10) "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

**HOSANNA!**

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

*Hosanna* and Palm Sunday – it's hard to mention one without thinking of the other. The two thoughts go hand in hand. *Hosanna*. It's the word the crowds lining the road to Jerusalem shouted joyfully and repeatedly, to Jesus. *Hosanna* was a liturgical word – a worship related word. It comes from Psalm 118, a psalm that the Jews used in their orders of service or liturgies for Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. *Hosanna* is still a word used in worship. When we use the Common Service with Holy Communion we sing, "Holy, holy holy Lord god of heavenly hosts: heaven and earth are full of your glory --- hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest. It's a word we use frequently in worship but I wonder how many of us clearly understand it. Well *Hosanna* actually comes from two Hebrew words: *Hoshea na*, and it means "Save, please," or "Help, please." Among the Jews, *Hosanna* became a two-word expression of praise for God – the one who truly could help and save.

Now that we understand the word better let's think about what it was that got the people of Jerusalem shouting their *Hosannas*. And when we see why they were praising Jesus, we'll see that he richly deserves our *Hosannas*, too.

**Say Your Hosannas to Jesus**

1. He comes as the Messiah
2. He comes in the name of the Lord
3. He comes to establish a kingdom

Jesus deserves our *Hosannas*, first, because he comes as the Messiah. In the Gospel for today we read that Jesus and his disciples **approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives**. The road that led to Jerusalem from the east rose dramatically to the summit of the Mount of Olives. There, from 200 feet above Jerusalem, you got a sweeping view of the city where Jesus would celebrate one last Passover with his disciples. Jerusalem was known as the City of David and the site of the temple of the Lord; it was filled with religious leaders who were hostile to Jesus. Jesus knew that and he went anyway. Jesus told his disciples: (Matthew 20:18-19) **"We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the**

**chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19) and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"**

It's clear that Jesus went to Jerusalem to die. And it's also clear that was a certain way in which Jesus wanted to enter Jerusalem. **'Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.'**" Jesus gave his disciples some very specific instructions. Jesus didn't just say, "I think I'd like to ride the rest of the way into the city on a donkey. See if you can find one." He displayed his divine knowledge of all things when he told the two disciples exactly where they'd find the animal he wanted. He even told them how to answer the challenge that was coming when they untied the colt.

We might wonder why Jesus pays so much attention to all of these details. Does it matter what he rides as he enters Jerusalem? Does it matter whether he rides a donkey or walks or rides in a cart? It matters a great deal! As we heard in our Old Testament lesson this morning, the prophet Zechariah had predicted that when the Messiah came to the daughter of Jerusalem, **he would be "riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."** Once someone I had never met asked me to meet him at a restaurant. I agreed, but I asked, "How will I recognize you?" He said he'd be driving a blue car and wearing a brown coat. As a result, I had no trouble recognizing him when he arrived at the restaurant. It's like that with Jesus on Palm Sunday. The way he entered Jerusalem made for instant recognition. By riding a donkey's colt, Jesus was declaring himself to be the Messiah.

When the prophet from Nazareth entered Jerusalem riding the colt of a donkey, the people responded appropriately. They broke into spontaneous shouts of *Hosanna!* It was their way of acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah he claimed to be. By their *Hosannas* they said, "*We believe that you are God's agent, our King sent from heaven.*" By the time of that first Palm Sunday, believers had been yearning and hoping for the Messiah for centuries, so when Jesus came, they gave him an all-out, fit-for-a-king, royal welcome. They hacked down palm branches and spread them on the road. They cushioned his pathway with their coats. They showered him with *Hosannas*

In the book *Five Key Habits of Smart Dads*, the author reports a survey in which men were asked to finish this sentence: "*I wish my father would say to me* — "Over and over again, the author got responses like this: I wish my father would say to me, "You did a good job," or "I am proud of you," or "I love you." He concludes that there are many sons—and daughters too—who are aching to hear words of praise from their fathers. To have to live without hearing words of praise can be a source of pain and frustration.

But it isn't just sons and daughters who go without praise. God has to do without praise, too. It happens when people can't quite get around to participating in worship. It happens when people's bodies are in worship, but their minds and spirits are elsewhere. It happens when prayer falls into disuse, or when prayers contain a series of requests, but are absent of praise. It's also true that praise for God doesn't only have to take place during an hour-long worship service. It can be informal as well as formal. We can praise God in our daily lives with our obedience to his will and with work and leisure that are done to his glory. The Palm Sunday crowds lining the road to Jerusalem remind us of the importance of praising God. Jesus deserves our *Hosannas*, too.

The crowds on Palm Sunday cite a second reason for giving Jesus our *Hosannas*. **He comes in the name of the Lord.** The crowd shouted, "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" Like the word *Hosanna*, this phrase also comes from the 118th Psalm. When the people shouted that Jesus had come "in the name of the Lord," they were saying that he had come in accordance with the promises of God's Word. They must have felt extraordinarily privileged to be able to witness these ancient promises being fulfilled. It had been 2000 years since God told Abraham that his offspring would be a blessing to all people. Great King David had died

clinging to these promises 1000 years earlier. Now the people lining Jesus' route into Jerusalem were seeing the fulfillment. Right before their eyes, God was keeping his promises.

Years ago there was a television advertisement which vividly pictured the pain of a broken promise. It showed a little boy waking up in the morning and remembering that this was the day his Dad was going to take him to a ballgame. With excitement written all over his face, he got cleaned up and dressed. When he was almost ready to leave his room, he heard a noise in the driveway and peered out the window, just in time to see his Dad putting his golf clubs into the trunk and driving off with a friend. The father had forgotten his promise. You could see the pain in the boy's face.

If God had done something like that to us, the pain would have been eternal. We'd be left to think that God doesn't care about us. Even worse, we'd have to deal with sin on our own and face death without the benefit of God's promises. But because Jesus came in the name of the Lord, he can stamp "fulfilled" on every promise that God has given us. God hasn't left us waiting at the window. Forgiveness, peace, and joy are ours now and forever through faith in Jesus. That's reason for saying our hosannas to Jesus. And now let's talk about one more reason for giving Jesus our Hosannas. 3) He comes to establish a kingdom.

The crowd shouted, "*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!*" David, as we noted, had been dead for a thousand years at this point. His grave was right there in Jerusalem. But the people of Israel had not forgotten God's promise to establish David's throne forever. They believed that when the Messiah arrived, David's kingdom would be established once again. And they were right, though perhaps not in the way they anticipated.

The popular conception of the Messiah's kingdom had him bringing about a change in rulers and world powers. Caesar and Herod and Pontius Pilate and all their assorted cronies would be driven out and the former glory of David's kingdom would be restored. But in the next days—the less celebrated days of Holy Week—it would become clear that Jesus had not come to challenge Pilate or Herod or anyone else to an earthly kingdom. It was during Holy Week that Jesus told the people to pay taxes, if they owed taxes. And rather than predicting a grand future for the city of Jerusalem, it was during Holy Week that Jesus predicted the destruction of the city. Sayings of Jesus like these caused more and more people to conclude that this Jesus was not at all the kind of king they had envisioned.

But he was a king nevertheless. He would say to Pontius Pilate early Friday morning of that week: **"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth."** (John 18:37) But Jesus also testified that his kingdom is not of this world. It is a peculiar kingdom. You could see that on Palm Sunday, when Jesus, the mighty monarch, rode into Jerusalem on the back of a lowly donkey. This kingdom of Jesus lacks borders. It lacks a military presence. It lacks bureaucrats. It's founded not on the sword, but on the truth—this truth: Jesus and Jesus alone is the way to life with the Father. With this truth Jesus defeated Satan and his lies and gathered for God a vast kingdom of people who share a common faith in Jesus. As subjects of this kingdom we can say with the apostle Paul, **"Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."** (Philippians. 3:20) Jesus deserves our *Hosannas* because he came to establish a kingdom in which he reigns over everything for our good. With our *Hosannas* we express our yearning for this kingdom and our allegiance to this King.

Whether we employ the Hebrew word *Hosanna*, or a more contemporary expression, and whether our praise is formal, like here in church, or informal, whether it is with words or actions Jesus does deserve our praise. He is the fulfillment of all God's promises, our Messiah and King. Because he rode into Jerusalem in lowly pomp to go to the cross and die for our sins, we have been saved. Our *Hosannas* have been answered. Amen.