

PALM SUNDAY

Hosanna!

April 5, 2009

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"*Hosanna!*" was the cry as Jesus came into Jerusalem. And we, this morning join in the refrain, "*Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the Highest!*"

Happy Palm Sunday. This is such a great day in the church year. Mark's account of the triumphal entry is fantastic because we see, for the first time in His life, people giving Jesus the Honor and Respect He deserves.

It seems that the people finally "get it." They aren't just welcoming Jesus as a renowned prophet, a miracle man, or even a civil hero. They recognize him as the Messiah. Make no bones about it, that is the claim being made, "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

And it's such a moving sight: people stripping the very coats off of their back and throwing them on the dusty ground for a donkey to trample, because the Messiah deserves the "red-carpet" treatment. Now, let's be honest here, a donkey isn't exactly the "Rolls Royce" of ancient vehicles. There were certainly horses around, and perhaps even more exotic animals. Very important people could also find transport in a chariot. But Jesus eschews all of the glorious mounts in favor of a humble donkey.

Yet, even in his humility He is being exalted. People were paving the road with their very clothes. There was probably no trumpet fanfare, but the herald of his coming was the cry of his own people, "Hosanna!"

On Palm Sunday, I always try to put myself in the crowd. I sing Hosanna, and wave palm branches, and welcome Christ into my home (and heart). If I ever neglect to give Jesus His due, today is the day I try to set that right.

And so, from my vantage point in the crowd, I try to imagine what Jesus must have been thinking and feeling that day. That smile... after working so

hard and being so misunderstood, finally He's being accepted. And those eyes, how they shine in the sun today! And those tears welling up, tears of joy?

"Hosanna!" we cry. Do you know what Hosanna means? We have turned it into a word of praise, I think, in our context – and maybe we're right to do so. But let's not lose its primary meaning. Hosanna translates into "Save us." Save us.

And there Jesus is, on the back of a foal, looking on as the impromptu parade thrown by beggars and sinners like us shouts, "Save us!" I believe in the deepest parts of His heart Jesus is answering back, "I do. And I will."

There is a sweet irony, too, because as we shout "Hosanna! Save us!" we scarcely know what those words even mean, but Jesus himself knows full well. Jesus knows what he has come to Jerusalem for... not to be the Messiah these assembled folk are asking for. He did not come to improve their living conditions. He did not come to usher in the end of wars or the end of poverty. He did not come to overthrow the secular government.

He came to die. And that is not the kind of plan that this assembly is on board with. Jesus knew what was ahead of Him. He knew who would betray Him. He could see mount Calvary from the back of that donkey. He knew how fickle these people were, how quickly their "Hosanna" would turn to "Crucify."

I would love to criticize all those people for their hypocrisy. I'd love to convict them for their lack of faith and faithfulness. I'd like to, but I can't because I'm standing with them in the crowd. Sure, on Sunday its easy to get together with a group of like-minded folk like you, and say the right words, and wave my palms of praise. But by the time Friday rolls around, is "Hosanna" the word on my lips? By Friday, does my life still welcome the Messiah? Or has my heart turned to itself? Has it grown callous toward Christ?

Yeah, I'm a hypocrite. I'm not proud of it, and I don't want to be one, but the reality of it comes back to me again and again. Satan, like the rabble-

rousers in the temple courtyard, creeps about me, riling me up, hardening my heart to Christ.

Maybe you're in the crowd with me. Maybe you've got you palm branch in one hand, and your doubts that you'll make it to next Sunday in the other hand.

Well, praise God that there's more to the story than that. See, if the story was about me, and how I treat Christ, it's more or less all bad news. But brothers and sisters, I have not come to bring the bad news... I'm here to bring the Good News.

The Good News is that the story is NOT about you or me. It's about Jesus. Jesus knew what he was getting into. He knew we were fickle and false and hypocrites. And that is EXACTLY why he came. That's what His death is all about. He'll never be God or Savior on our terms – not because he doesn't accommodate us (because He certainly does that and more), but because the God we want is too small and the Savior we want is too petty.

When we say "Save us," He does more than we could have hoped or dreamed. He doesn't just save us from our circumstances; He saves us from Death, from the Devil, and yes, even from Ourselves.

And you know what else? Our sinfulness and our hypocrisy don't negate our praise. Jesus didn't silence the Palm Sunday crowd, but accepted their praise and honor graciously. It's like the parent who cherishes the crayon scribbles of a child. Nothing we offer here is worthy of Christ. No Song, no Prayer, no Heart. But Christ embraces them all with His Love, and he makes our songs and our prayers and our hearts worthy of Him. And He delights when his people ask of him the one thing that matters in all the world:

"Hosanna! Save us!"