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Palm Sunday
Text: Luke 19:29-42
March 29, 2015

Hosanna Tears of Misunderstanding

“Hosanna, Hosanna! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” Those are the words of the first Christians, spoken that very first Palm Sunday. Those are also the words of contemporary Christians; words that we still joyously speak and sing today wherever two or three are gathered in Christ’s name. I don’t know about you, but for me the very word itself—“*hosanna*”—immediately evokes this great sense of **joy and elation**, especially when you consider the fact that these joyous words are proclaimed loud and proud after five weeks of Lenten **somberness** and that constant **doom-and-gloom** Lenten call for us to repent and turn from our sin. These Palm Sunday praises burst forth with a joy that pierces all that Lenten gloom and despair. It’s almost like it’s a **pep rally** for Easter. *“It’s getting to be that time. Let’s get up and get motivated! We only have one week before Easter!”*

Now, I know that some of you are sitting there and thinking, *“That’s not right. Palm Sunday isn’t a mere warm-up act for Easter.”* You’re absolutely correct in this assessment. However...might there be a chance that our loud and joyous hosannas could still be **misdirected and misunderstood**? It certainly wouldn’t be the first time that this was the case. In fact, as we turn our attention to the Gospel lesson for today, St. Luke tells us quite clearly in verse 37 that those first Christians who were singing and praising and raining down loud hosannas upon Jesus were rejoicing over the **mighty works they had seen**. Hmm...that doesn’t sound very good and faithful, does it? You almost get the sense that this crowd was so elated and worked up and champing at the bit because they thought even **bigger and better** things were about to go down. *“Just look at all the mighty and miraculous things Jesus did before. Now He’s getting ready to really pull the trigger. He’s entering into our capital city on a donkey as King. Now is our time! Hosanna! The shackles of Roman oppression; the shackles of being considered second-class citizens by the rest of the world, they’re all coming off! Just wait until Jesus starts acting as King! Hosanna!”*

Folks: Do you know what “hosanna” means? **“Hosanna” is a Hebrew word of praise meaning, “save us now.”** I want you to think about that for a moment. Think about what is being said. *“Save us now!”* It’s a praise-filled word precisely because it is directed at the one who can do just that—save us now. It’s a **proclamation of recognition**. *“You are our savior and deliverer! Thank God you’re here! Save us! Save us now! Hosanna!”*

With this in mind, consider again those first hosannas on that first Palm Sunday. I have no doubt that the people wanted saving, **but saving from what?** I have no doubt that they recognized Jesus as a savior and deliverer, **but savior and**

deliverer from what? From Roman occupation? From a life of squalor and oppression? From a life of second-class citizenry?

And before we go any further, we need to ask these same questions of ourselves. We, too, cry out our hosannas all the time. ***That's what faithful Christians do, right?*** But what are we crying out for? What are we asking to be saved from? From a bad day? From a tight checkbook? From a strained relationship? You know as well as I do that people sometimes view “church” as nothing more than a ***quick-fix panacea***. Come to church for free therapy. Come to church to get your pantry stocked. Come to church to get gas money or a little help with the electric bill. Come to church to find a lonely single like yourself. “*Hosanna! Save me, Jesus! Save me from my troubles! Save me from these crosses I bear!*” And even churches and pastors can fall into this trap. “*Hosanna, Jesus! Save us! Save us from low offerings! Save us from poor attendance! Save us from the Voters' Assembly! Save us from our budget woes!*” Not exactly true to the meaning of the word, is it?

That's why I purposefully included verses 41 &42 in our Gospel reading for today. “*And when Jesus drew near and saw the city, He wept over it, saying, 'Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!'*” Let that sink in a bit. All the loud hosannas; all the shouts of joy and palm leaves; the street covered over in cloaks to pave the way for the object/subject and recipient of all those calls for salvation and deliverance...***and Jesus weeps because no one seems to get it.***

Now, I know that some of you are probably thinking that Jesus is weeping over the city full of Pharisees and “bad guys.” ***This is true...but could not the same thing be said of all those around Him waving those palm leaves and shouting their loud hosannas?*** “*Would that you had known the things that make for peace.*” Remember: Every one of those people, including Jesus' own apostles, saw Jesus' arrest, suffering, and crucifixion as **total abject failure**. When the going got tough, they got going. Their Shepherd was struck, and the flock scattered. “*We thought He was the One, but then He was put to death.*” “*Would that you had known the things that make for peace.*”

And this is where we come in. We do know the rest of the story, don't we? We have a distinct advantage that those first Palm Sunday Christians didn't have. We know that Jesus is processing into Jerusalem on that first day of the week for the sole purpose of bringing His Father's plan of salvation to completion. We know that peace—God's peace, which surpasses all human understanding—is ***only*** realized in the bitter sufferings and death of Him who was holy and without sin. We know that at the end of that procession; at the end of that week is a bloody cross; a gruesome death and hellish divine wrath and forsakenness for the sins of the entire world...***for the salvation and deliverance of the entire world.*** We know

all these things that those first Palm Sunday Christians didn't. And yet...do our "hosannas" often ring just as hollow? Can we be accused of crying out "hosanna" for all the wrong things? Can we still be accused of not knowing or recognizing (or even shunning) the things that make for true peace?

We know the answers to these questions, don't we? The answers aren't pretty either. In fact, they're rather ugly and stained with sin. **Repent!** Cry out your *kyrie*. "*Lord, have mercy!*" Cry out your *hosanna*. "*Save me. Deliver me.*" Repent and turn to the sole source of your forgiveness, your deliverance, your salvation. Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

My dear fellow redeemed: This is precisely our Palm Sunday joy and peace this very day! Here is every reason to rejoice and cry out with a loud and thankful "Hosanna!" Here is Christ Jesus, keeping His Word and Promise, abiding with us *always*. Here He is, coming to us still in very *meek and lowly* forms, coming to us by means of ordinary Word, ordinary water, ordinary bread and wine. Yes, these are very ordinary and lowly and unassuming means. They're easy to overlook. They're even easier to dismiss and disregard as *ineffective or insufficient* for peace. But, O, the peace they bring and impart to us! It truly is beyond all human understanding. In fact, it can only be understood in faith. Here is Christ! Here are His unconditional and absolutely free gifts of grace, mercy, and peace that surpasses all understanding! Here is the true and complete answer to our "hosanna!"

Understood in the cruciform light of your complete justification in Christ alone and because of Christ alone, the trials, tribulations, and crosses we daily bear in this fallen and sinful world really have a way of getting put into proper perspective, don't they? The tears we shed as we cry out in the midst of our suffering and pain and sorrow; as we cry out for deliverance, are tears that God Himself turns to *tears of joy* through the working of His Holy Spirit in His Word; Word which proclaims to us the truth and the joy of our being completely redeemed and forgiven in the all-redeeming suffering, death, and resurrection of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ in the flesh. Whether we live or whether we die, we belong to Christ. It doesn't get any better than that.

My dear brothers and sister in Christ: Your "hosannas" have been answered. Christ Jesus has suffered, died, and risen again for you. It is finished, once and for all. The one and only thing that makes for true peace has been brought to completion. It is finished! The peace that surpasses all understanding—God's divine and Fatherly peace—is yours *right now*. The angelic proclamation at Christ's birth finds its fulfillment in Christ's passion and resurrection. That truth and reality of that angelic proclamation rings loud and clear for us today. "*Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth!*" It is finished, in Christ

and because of Christ. Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth.

May your hearts, minds, and souls be filled with this Christ-centered joy and peace all your remaining days. Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

AMEN