

Hosanna...from What?

Given the events and circumstances of these past twelve months, the loud and joyous shouts of “hosanna” seem so out of place, don’t they? Hosanna is such a happy word. Given our current affairs, however, Christ’s Good Friday lament seems more suited to our reality. *“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”* Well... not so fast. For those of you who don’t know, “Hosanna” is Hebrew for “*save us now!*” It’s a proclamation of recognition. *“You are our savior and deliverer! Thank God you’re here! Save us! Hosanna!”* The Pharisees certainly understand what this word means, because we’re told that when they heard the crowd singing these loud hosannas; in particular, when they heard the youngest of little children in the Temple crying out those loud hosannas to Jesus (Matt 21), they became very angry. *“Jesus, command your disciples to be silent!”*

Think about that for a moment. The miracle of a small little child—even a little baby—crying out loud hosannas to their Savior didn’t make these guys tremble in fear, or at the very least, question the miracle playing itself out before their very eyes/ears. *“You know... maybe we’re missing something here.”* Nope. All that happened is that they saw their own power and authority being challenged and lost. These miraculous hosannas didn’t drive them to repentance. These hosannas—these overt displays of faith in action—only made these arrogant fools even more angry and upset. Take offense if you will, but you and I both know that those Pharisees would’ve fit in quite well over these past few months as Christians tried to worship their Lord and Savior, even in the midst of pandemic and fear and sorrow. *“Stop that! No singing! No praising Jesus! Go home!”* And how does Jesus respond? *“I tell you, if these ones were quiet, the very stones would cry out!”* These little faithful ones couldn’t help but sing their praises and their loud hosannas when in the presence of their Lord and Savior. They got it. They understood. *Hosanna! Save us, Jesus!*

But... that raises a good question: What exactly were all those first Palm Sunday revelers crying out to be saved from? *“Hosanna! Save us now, Jesus!”* *Save us...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 high taxes?

And before we go any further, we need to ask these same questions of ourselves. We, too, cry out some rather *self-centered hosannas* all the time, *especially over these past several months.* What exactly are we crying out to be delivered from; to be saved from? From sickness? From a bad day? Too much togetherness? From a tight checkbook/joblessness? From a lack of toilet paper? *“Hosanna! Save me, Jesus! Save me from these crosses I bear!”* And even

churches and pastors have fallen into this trap. *“Hosanna, Jesus! Save us! Save us from low offerings! Save us from poor attendance!” Not exactly true to the meaning of the word, is it?* What if those particular crosses we lament aren’t taken from us, even after all our loud hosannas? Does this mean that our hosannas have fallen on deaf ears? *Are we not saved?*

St. Luke tells us in verses 41-42: *“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 those excited, hopeful, joyous shouts for deliverance; all those palm leaves and cloaks thrown down in the street to symbolically pave the way for the victorious savior and bringer of “peace”...*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? In fact, 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 know. ***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 perhaps 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 [crucifix; Word and Sacraments] is *precisely* our Palm Sunday joy and peace this very day, even in the midst of the all the sickness and sorrow and corruption and despair! The Church on earth has always been a Church under the cross. There is nothing new under the sun. That being the case, here is every reason to rejoice and cry out with a loud and thankful “Hosanna!” ***Here is Christ Jesus, right where He promises to be, always and to the end of the age.*** Here is the incorruptible Lord of Life, keeping His Word and Promise, abiding with us always. Here He is, still coming to us, just like on the first Palm Sunday, 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 and ignore because it’s so easy to deem them ***ineffective or insufficient for anything, especially peace.*** “*They don’t have the power to stop corona virus! They don’t have the power to stop job loss. I take communion, and I’m no better now than I was before. In fact, that bread and wine and close proximity to others could get me sick... maybe even dead.*”

I’ll ask you: What do you believe concerning the ***real presence of Christ?*** It’s easy to be faithful when life is easy and the crosses are minimal. Do you take Immanuel at His Word, or is it just lip-service? Do you practice what you preach? Careful! God knows the Truth! Folks: Where the Immanuel Prince of Peace is, there is the peace that surpasses all human understanding. In fact, it’s a peace that can only be understood in faith. Folks: Here He is! Here are His unconditional and absolutely free gifts of grace, mercy, and peace. ***Here is God’s response to our “hosanna!”***

And I do pray that this means something to you; that’s it’s not just “Sunday morning theory” that we practice when life is easy or convenient. The tears we shed as we bear our crosses and cry out in the midst of our suffering and pain and sorrow; as we cry out for deliverance, are tears of sorrow 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 suffering, death, and resurrection of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ in the flesh. Folks: We have His sure and certain Word and Promise. Whether we live, whether we die, and everything in between, **we belong to Christ.** Not even the gates of hell can prevail against this. It does have a way of putting everything else into proper perspective, doesn’t it?

My dear brothers and sister in Christ: ***Your “hosannas” have been answered.*** In fact, they’re being answered right now, in your very presence, as the Lord of Life brings heaven to earth for you. (Angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven....”) 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, and it is this victorious cruciform peace that your Lord nourishes you with this very day in His Word and His sacraments.

You know... when you think about it, the angelic proclamation that was first made at Christ's birth finds its fulfillment in Christ's passion and resurrection. The angelic Christmas proclamation rings true, loud and clear for us today. "*Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth!*" ***Here is this peace on earth, and His name is Jesus;*** the name His heavenly Father gave Him, because He saves His people from their sins. And now here on Palm Sunday, as He is processing to fulfill the whole reason for His coming to earth, we hear the crowds sing of ***peace in heaven*** as the enmity between God and man is rent asunder and God's peace is made manifest through the blood of Christ; the very blood of God Himself in the flesh. "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*" ***Think about this: All the focus is on Christ and His all-atoning sacrifice! Peace in heaven; peace on earth... peace in Christ and because of Christ.***

May your hearts, minds, and souls be filled with this Christ-centered joy and peace all your remaining days, now and into all eternity. **AMEN**