

Palm/Passion Sunday
April 9, 2017
Mark 11:
Psalm 118:19-29

This is Hosanna Day.

This is the day and the time for shouts of praising and songs of hosanna to fill the sanctuary, saturate our ears, burst our souls! After five weeks of Alleluia-free worship, it feels good to let loose some enthusiastic optimism, no?

Hosanna—Hoshiya-na -- For a word that is found only once in the Hebrew scripture, in Psalm 118 which you heard read earlier, it is a popular word, both in traditional Hebrew worship (sung during the Festival of Booths or “Sukkoth”) and in the Christian celebration of Palm Sunday. At Jesus’ king-like procession into Jerusalem the crowds sing Hosanna!

The meaning is two-fold:

An exclamation of praise:

Praise God and God’s Messiah!

Bless God!

Glory to God!

Or on this day in Jerusalem: King Jesus, bless you!

Hosanna is also a word of supplication, a plea around which is wrapped certainty that it will be answered:

Save us! Rescue us! You are the one who can do this! You are one like King David, one like God. Do it! Save us!

It's a particular saving they are requesting.

Save us from those who have taken our land, our temple, our hope, our future. Save us from the Romans and their collaborators. Give us back our respect, our honor. Be our King.

Hosanna!, then, is a word of celebrative praise *and* a word of expectant hope.

The word and the songs and prayers come freely and furtively on. Jesus' disciples believe the word applies not only to the Almighty God to whom they pray, but to THIS particular human riding on a donkey...

riding like victorious Hebrew military leaders, like Hebrew kings did to their coronation, like the coming Messiah would.

The Jesus Hosanna parade isn't the only parade in Jerusalem. There's another parade, this one of the Roman military, arriving with reinforcements from Pilate's Caesaria Maritima, a splendid palace on the Mediterranean far more comfortable than the dirty, provincial and sometimes antagonistic city of the Jews. Pilate and his entourage, a regal one to be sure, are arriving from the west, through the Damascus Gate. It was typical to come into Jerusalem for the major festivals, like Passover, not to honor the event, but as a show of force to discourage riots, to keep the Jews from being too uppity. Among those who saw this display, some were awed, some cowered, some in fear gave homage, most remained silent. According to Roman theology the emperor is the "son of god", "Lord", and the "One who saves". If you didn't agree with that, it was best to keep quiet and out of the way.

The Jesus procession then is a counter-demonstration, both political and religious. This parade enters from the east, through the Beautiful Gate at the base of the Mount of Olives. The gate through which it is prophesied that the Messiah will come.

Jesus doesn't stop them, in fact he may have prearranged the procession. He doesn't rile up the crowds, give a speech, self-congratulate. It's as if he's saying go ahead... I am your King, your Messiah, but you have absolutely no idea what that will mean for me, or for you.

I wonder if the hosannas warmed his spirit. affirmed his ministry.

I wonder if the procession encouraged him for what would come.

I wonder if it pleased him that at least some of his disciples understood.

Palm Sunday. Do you wish we could bask in the Hosannas for a while instead of plunging into Holy Week? Make this Sunday a whole liturgical season. Like those who traveled with him for three years, listening to his stories, his interpretation of the prophets, the law, this

is a moment to exhale the stress of all that is wrong with the world and inhale the hope blowing through the palms.

Not so fast. These Hosannas are not all “sweet” and they are potent words to come from the lips of children.

They are *hope-filled cries* of those seeking liberation for their suffering people.

Hosannas are *war cries* of tired bedraggled peasants who had it with occupying forces, had it with the homage they are forced to give Rome. (The children of Syria need some Hosannas.)

They are *desperate cries* of those who choose this man because he is their best chance yet for change.

They are *dangerous cries* of insurrection, words stolen from Caesar, the only king anyone in Jerusalem can legally acknowledge, the only man who can be praised--safely.

This Hosanna business is hardly benign.

Hosanna declares a truth about Jesus: He is the Messiah. He will save—not a Roman emperor.

Palm Sunday is Hosanna Day. Then. Now.

Shout Hosanna. Hosanna! Hosanna!

And then comes Monday.

Where have the Hosannas gone?

Where is the certainty, the enthusiasm, the expectation of Jesus' rule? Was it all a sham? He arrives in Jerusalem, looks around, and goes back to Bethany to sleep. No one acknowledges him, no priests meet him to crown him king. Nothing.

He will save, but even those who plead for it don't understand how. He is one who will not save by raising a militia and banishing the Romans, not save by restoring the fortunes of Jerusalem, not by sitting on an elaborate human-made throne. This is a king who will save by walking the Way of humiliation, violence, and death and beyond.

Where have the Hosannas gone?

Are the optimistic hosannas buried by an avalanche of imperialistic realism? Or is this enthusiastic counter-demonstration hushed by fear of soldiers' spears?

Where have the hosannas gone? Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday...

Are our words of praise, *our* affirmations of Jesus' purpose so quickly silenced when circumstances shift? Do we only look to the message and person of Christ and ascribe to him the way of justice and truth when it is safe and popular?

Who gets our hosannas of praise and trust when Jesus doesn't? Who will save the oppressed from oppressor? Who will bring new life?

Come Friday, Mark writes

"the soldiers led Jesus into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the

Jews!” They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take. It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews”.

King of the Jews. On Sunday the title brought Hosannas, honor and praise and hope; clothes, coats lined the road so he could ride in dignity. On Friday, when he is again the center of attention the sounds he hears will be jeers, not cheers. He is not riding over clothes-

padded stones or hearing coronation psalms; he is stripped of his clothes, humiliated, and “crowned” with a wreath of blood drawing thorns. Once a hero, he is mocked as a fraud.

Where have the Hosannas gone?

As this week, this Holy Week advances, what if we keep hosannas on our lips. Don’t allow circumstances, or fear, or pressure shut us down. What if we were to sing a sustaining strain of Hosanna when events turn:

When Jesus overturns the tables in the temple:

Shout Hosanna! (Hosanna)

When he is questioned, grilled by the scribes and elders:

State Hosanna!

When he is anointed, by the woman in Bethany on his head, like at a king’s coronation, with burial ointment, nard, as if being prepared for burial:

Whisper Hosanna!

When he is eating the Passover meal with his disciples:

Hosanna!

When the disciples fail him and Judas betrays him in the garden:

Say Hosanna! Hosanna

When the chief priest and Pilate accuse him of blasphemy:

Answer no: Hosanna! Hosanna

When Peter denies him:

Pray Hosanna! Hosanna!

When the crowds call “crucify him”, we answer in return, no:

Counter with: Hosanna!

When he is hung from the cross, the charge, “King of the Jews”:

Declare: Hosanna!

When he is buried in the garden, the stone rolled into place:

Weep: Hosanna.

What if our Hosanna doesn't cease until dawn on the third day when it becomes Alleluia?

