

We Cry Hosanna!

By: Meagan McLaughlin

April 5, 2020. The people walking along with Jesus on his triumphant entry into Jerusalem were yelling out, "Hosanna!" This was not so much a cry of joy, though, as it was a cry for help. Palm Sunday this year is different from other years, isn't it? Here we are a week away from Easter, dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, and we are crying out for help that we know only God can give.

Reading: [Matthew 21:1-11](#)

*** Transcript ***

We tend to think of Palm Sunday as a parade like St. Patrick's Day, a big street party with lots of music and dancing and food, a time of exuberant celebration, and unbridled fun. And that was certainly part of it, that day so long ago, when Jesus was entering Jerusalem. The people gathered spontaneously to sing and wave branches, and to walk along the road together as a community.

My favorite Twin Cities parade, before it was canceled a few years ago, was always the Holidazzle Parade. It would take place every night from Thanksgiving through Christmas, outside — yes, we are crazy like that in Minnesota! — and people would come hours early to eat downtown, to go to the Macy's Eighth-Floor Holiday Display, and then line up on the street to watch the parade after it was dark. All the floats and even the costumes were lit, and the costumes and music were amazing. It was a great chance for the community to come together in defiance of the winter snow and ice and cold. What's your favorite parade?

There is more to this parade though, this Palm Sunday parade, this triumphant entry into Jerusalem, than what appears at first glance. Because this was a parade not to celebrate an anniversary or a heritage or a season or even a community. The people, Matthew tells us, were shouting "Hosanna!" as they walked with Jesus into the city. It can be understood to be an exclamation of praise and honor, and it is. But interestingly, most closely translated, hosanna means "save us." Think about that for a moment. The people walking along with Jesus were crying out to be saved. Jesus was the focal point of this parade, the whole reason for the spontaneous gathering. And those who gathered there were poor, oppressed, beaten down by the occupying forces. And they were yelling out, "Hosanna!" This was not so much a cry of joy as it was a cry for help, from a people who believed that Jesus could save them.

This gathering of people claiming their right to be heard, and their faith in the possibility of freedom and justice, was probably more like the March on Selma for basic rights and freedom for black people led by Martin Luther King, Jr. and other black leaders, or the historic demonstration for LGBTQ rights and lives at Stonewall that was led by queer trans women, than it was like your typical St. Patrick's Day parade. This was an act of resistance to the injustice and despair in their world, an act of hope, of community standing together in solidarity with one another, welcoming the one they believed could change their lives. As Matthew tells the story, this is emphasized by the passage from Zachariah that Matthew quotes: "Your king is coming to you, mounted on a donkey and a colt," claiming Jesus as that king who would save God's people — not the Roman emperor, but Jesus, God come to us in human form, to fulfill God's promise.

This Palm Sunday is different from other years, isn't it? Here we are a week away from Easter, knowing we'll be experiencing a Lent of sorts for a while, as we all do everything we can to respond to

the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. This year, more than other years, we are fully aware that we need more than our own efforts, more than our local and national rulers can do, to bring us through this crisis that is impacting all of humanity. We know this year, more than most, the limits to our human capacity. We know more than ever that we need one another and that we need God to save us. This year, more than most, we join the crowd that gathered around Jesus and claimed him as the king come to save God's people. We cry out with those most vulnerable to becoming ill, those who do not have access to what they need at this time, those whose jobs have ended, those waiting for basic protective equipment but continuing to heal and serve, those who are painfully lonely in this time of physical separation.

Let us together — in joy and desperation, in hope and determination and faith, across time and space and Zoom — add our voices to the voices of resistance crying, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" Grab your noisemakers, friends. It is time for a parade. Or you may have something to wave, or you may wave your palms as John Hoffmann likes to say, or you may just choose to watch the parade as it goes in front of you. Let us celebrate together.

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