

Hosanna! Save Us Now!

By: Meagan McLaughlin

March 28, 2021. Today we celebrate Palm Sunday and commemorate Jesus' triumphant parade into Jerusalem. But why does it cause such turmoil? What was so earth-shaking about it? And most of all, who is this Jesus who has us all crying out to be saved?

Readings: [Philippians 2:5-11](#), [Matthew 21:1-11](#)

*** Transcript ***

Our 40 Days of Lent is drawing to a close, and once again this year we take time this Palm Sunday to mark the transition from the days of reflection and seeking, to walking with Jesus into Jerusalem as Holy Week begins. And as always, we tell the story of how Jesus, the son of a carpenter turned itinerant preacher, entered Jerusalem with a parade.

A crowd gathered to meet Jesus as he approached the city, perhaps because they had heard him preach when he had been there before, perhaps because they had been among those healed over Jesus' time of ministry, perhaps because they had heard that Jesus had actually raised a dead man — Lazarus — to life again. Whatever their motives, their cries as they walked revealed the hopes they had as they welcomed Jesus on the road — “Hosanna!” Save us now! The people, whatever their specific longings and desires, believed that Jesus could save them. They had very specific ideas as to what that might look like, and greeted him as they would greet a king: shouts of joy and praise and recognition, leading and following in procession, waving palm branches and laying them along the road in front of him.

Hosanna! Save us now! We have spent our 40 days of Lent seeking God's truth in our scriptures, and in our lives — the truth of God's love and mercy and our identities as children of God, and the truth of our sin and brokenness, and the sin and brokenness of the world. Over two thousand years have passed since Jesus walked the road to Jerusalem, but the brokenness of the world and our deep need for God have not changed.

We, like those crying out hosanna on the road into the city, need to be saved. Our communities face the evils of gun violence, which resulted in the deaths of ten people in yet another mass shooting this week, this time in Boulder. And it feels like we hear of more every day. The challenges and even trauma of the pandemic, which is just beginning to wane after a year. The sin of white supremacy and racism which continues to wound and divide, even as the trial for the man who murdered George Floyd moves forward this week. Poverty, which holds so many trapped in situations they cannot escape from.

We think of all the pain in this world that can seem insurmountable, and we know, if we didn't before, that we need help. We know, as we hear the stories of God's promise to us and how God has brought freedom, healing, and love to people since the beginning, that there is only one place to turn. And we join our voices with the crowd walking that road with Jesus crying out, “Hosanna! Save us now!”

There is something else about this event that we don't often think about because it isn't mentioned in our scriptures, but historically the procession, greeting, and leading the way for Jesus as he enters Jerusalem is not the only parade taking place in the city. Pilate, the Roman ruler who would in a few short days give the order for Jesus' brutal execution, was also entering Jerusalem — and in a much grander procession: trumpeters, banners, royal guards, strong horses. As the Jewish people celebrated Passover to remember their freedom from slavery in Egypt, Pilate wanted the Jewish people to know

without question that no matter what triumphs they may have experienced in the past, Roman rule was absolute. And so, as he did every year, Pilate processed in glory from the east, and Jesus came surrounded by the least of these from the west. Compared to Pilate's demonstration of a royal glory fit for a king, Jesus' humble parade hardly seems worthy of mention.

So why does Jesus' entry into Jerusalem cause, as Matthew puts it, turmoil? This is no mild, eyebrow-raising event that leaves people scratching their heads, but a significant disruption, leaving people as shocked as if an earthquake had moved the ground under their feet. Why would a gathering of people carrying palm branches lead to turmoil? What was so earth-shaking about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem? And most of all, who is this Jesus who has us all crying out to be saved?

As we've heard so many times, one thing we know about Jesus is that whatever our expectations, he seems to fail them, and exceed them, all at the same time. Many expected that when the Messiah came, he would come with military might, overthrowing Roman occupation and restoring the kingdom of Israel. Religious leaders expected those who deigned to teach and minister to follow Mosaic law, and show deference to the traditions of the temple above all else. We might expect Jesus to erase all the evil of this world instantly, removing all pain in a magical sort of way, and show us what we are to do in, perhaps in a great billboard in the sky. (How many times have I asked God for that?) But Jesus doesn't do any of that.

Instead, Jesus tells the story of a man attacked by robbers, and how the religious leaders pass him by — and the Samaritan, of all people, cares for him. Jesus eats with those with power, certainly, but over and over chooses to spend his time with tax collectors, sinners, and outcasts. Of all the conversations Jesus had that are recorded in our gospels, the longest conversation takes place by a well, in the middle of the day, with a Samaritan *woman*. He heals on the Sabbath, proclaims forgiveness of sins, and in so many other ways, Jesus is constantly pushing the boundaries, stepping outside of accepted norms, and challenging the powers that be with the expansive force of God's love.

And now he has raised a person from the dead, and has people believing that he can save them too. And he enters the city, a crowd leading the way for him, in a procession that is far less ornate than Pilate's, but patterned after it so closely that it almost seems to mock with its simplicity and inclusion of the very people Pilate would like to control. It's also interesting to know that palms were meant to be waved only for national heroes, not for "ordinary people," adding insult to injury for Pilate. Not military might, not conforming to norms, but showing up in a way one would not expect of God incarnate — and making a farce of the emperor while he's at it. No wonder the city was in turmoil!

Our second reading today gives us one explanation of what Jesus was up to as he walked and talked and ministered among God's people on this earth, and perhaps what God is still up to in our world today. Jesus, Paul writes, "Did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross."

Jesus came to be a king, absolutely, but not the kind of king who rules with military might and force and controls through fear and intimidation, but a king who empties himself out of obedience. We might think of Jesus as one who so embodied God's love for all of us that he couldn't help but enter into the very depths of our pain and brokenness and empty himself, pouring out his love on all of creation, all of us, even if it meant suffering and dying on the cross.

And this is where God in Jesus exceeds our expectations, over and over and over again. No matter what

we do, or what happens to us, Jesus does not turn away. No matter what the mistakes we make, God is always there to forgive, and guide us closer to God's kin-dom. And however unworthy we may feel, Jesus constantly calls us to be part of the procession, leading the way and proclaiming that Jesus will, in ways we may never expect, save us.

Thanks be to God.

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