

“We Who Shout”  
 a sermon preached by Anna Pinckney Straight  
 Old Stone Presbyterian Church ✦ Lewisburg, WV  
 March 25, 2018

Mark 11: 1 – 11

*Then they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” <sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. <sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup>Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,*

*“Hosanna!*

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*<sup>10</sup>Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!*

*Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

*<sup>11</sup>Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.*

The first lesson of Palm Sunday is that when Jesus goes into Jerusalem, it’s a little bit like a parade.

You know, a parade. Like Macy’s Thanksgiving Parade in New York City. Or what will happen when the NCAA Men’s Basketball Champions return home (at least I think that’s what will happen-- someone tells me that there is still basketball going on, I thought it was all over).<sup>1</sup>

A parade. A celebratory gathering where people are happy to be together, sharing a common joy.

Scholars tell us that when people gathered for Passover in Jerusalem, the celebration remembering their Exodus from Egypt, the atmosphere was like<sup>2</sup> anticipatory celebration- just waiting to burst forth. Families gathering from all over for the pilgrimage of a lifetime, Gathering in THE holy place to remember and proclaim what God had done for them, to ask and remember, “Why is this night different from other nights?”

And when Jesus approaches they have their branches at the ready (Palms for John, Leaves for Matthew, cloaks in Luke), ready to praise God old-school, like they did in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Maccabees

The pump is primed, the people are ready, and when Jesus arrives, on a colt, the crowd erupts.

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<sup>1</sup> At this point, WVU, Marshall, UNC, and Virginia have all lost- that covers most of the allegiances in my congregation.

<sup>2</sup> Brian P. Stoffregen Exegetical Notes at Crossmarks

<http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/palmsun.htm>    <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/palmsunb.htm>

Accessed 4.10.14

Remembering their liberation, they see cause for celebration, they hope it will happen again. They see it happening again. They just know that any moment the plagues will arrive, the Romans will be expelled, and they will be free. Free. Free.

They see their moment just around the corner, and they celebrate. They take their cloaks. They take their branches, They shout. They proclaim.

*“Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

Which brings us to the second lesson of Palm Sunday. This is much more than a parade, in fact, it can be more accurately described as a protest, or a rally.

We have some experience with that in this state. The teachers who went to Charleston every day for almost two weeks asking for help.

The hundreds of thousands of young people and adults who gathered around the world yesterday- more than 200,000 in Washington DC alone<sup>3</sup>- around a simple idea, that children should not fear for their lives when they go to school.

The first Palm Sunday shares some common ground with this year’s Saturday before Palm Sunday.

We know that because of what Mark tells us, and in the words the people shouted, starting with Hosanna.

Hosanna itself.

Hosanna isn’t merely a Hooray, it is a cry for help just as it is a cry of happiness.<sup>4</sup> Cry for help for a people hurting and in need, mixed with joy, because you think you see your salvation before you. Around you.

And it’s not just the word Hosanna. We find elements of a rally, a protest, in what else the people say, and what they are referencing when they say it. *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!* which echoes back to Psalm 118. Psalm 118 which is most famous to many of us because of verse 24 *“This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”*

But goes on in the next two verses to say:

<sup>25</sup> *Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!*

<sup>26</sup> *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD.*

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord is what happens after the beseeching, after the crying out in need. Because the people recognize God in their midst.

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<sup>3</sup> Early estimates from the organizers (and the numbers I saw most often quoted in the time just after the rally) put that number around 800,000 (what I used in the sermon). After worship I found more accurate information (CBS News) that indicate the rally was 202,796 at its peak.

<sup>4</sup> <http://biblehub.com/greek/5614.htm>

hósanna: save, we pray

Original Word: ὡσαννά

Part of Speech: Hebrew Form (Indclinable)

Definition: (Aramaic and Hebrew, originally a cry for help), hosanna!, a cry of happiness.

And they are a people who are in need. Dominated. Under foreign rule. They fear for their lives. For their livelihood. And they want God to save them. That is their cry on Palm Sunday.

The third lesson of Palm Sunday is the one that will unfold in the weeks and days ahead. As I heard expressed many times yesterday, the real impact of yesterday's marches and rallies cannot be seen yet. It will be determined in how people bring about change, change in their own lives, change in the world that is around them. Sacrifices they are willing to make. Hopes of which they will not let go.

As expressed most recently by Lin Manuel Miranda in his musical *Hamilton* about events in this nation more than 200 years ago, "This is not a moment it's the movement."

That's the ultimate lesson we have to learn from Palm Sunday.

For many years, most of my adult years, the question I've brought to Palm Sunday is this: How can we sustain our Hosannas from Palm Sunday so that we don't become the people who shout "crucify him" later in the week.

But I've come to realize that this is the wrong question. Wrong because that's exactly what I suspect the people of the first Palm Sunday did. They pinned everything on that moment, those hosannas, and thought that it would all be solved.



They were Thurston and Mrs. Howell from *Gilligan's Island*, hearing that rescue was imminent and donning their pearls and best clothes to wait for someone to save them.

The people welcoming Jesus aren't celebrating his accomplishments, they are welcoming someone they think is there to save them, but they aren't yet ready to partner with Jesus in their own salvation. And when they realize that Jesus wasn't there to do the work for them, they go back to what they knew, what they knew would keep them as safe as possible, even if not whole, pacifying the Romans.

What did Jesus think of this parade? This protest? I can't, won't suggest that I know. What I can say is that he went out of his way to tell the people to enjoy the moment but embrace the movement. This is not Jesus' triumphal entry, because he is not triumphant. He rides in on a colt, which would have looked comical being ridden by an adult. The parade ends at the city limits and does not continue inside. And when he enters, Jesus, Mark tells us, does not survey the communities or the neighborhoods, something a conquering, saving her would have done to prepare for the liberation, Jesus goes to the temple, and simply looks around there. His entry is in direct opposition to the military parades that would have brought in the Roman rulers of the day, some even suggesting that Pilate would have entered Jerusalem that very week with such a parade, filled with horses and military equipment and finery.<sup>5</sup> Jesus is telling the people, "I am not the way you will overcome, but I will show you the way, and I will go with you. In fact, I will lead you, for I have been there before. Follow me."

And so, this lesson of Palm Sunday will unfold for us in the days and weeks ahead, too.

The question isn't how can we sustain our hosannas, it's what can we learn from them?

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<sup>5</sup> Leander E. Keck, New Testament Editor, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. VIII, "Mark" by PHEME PERKINS. [Nashville: Abingdon Press] 1995, 658-659.

Where are we hoping God will save us, and where has God already shown us the way?

The way to overcome fear with love.

The way to overcome despair with hope.

The way to beat those swords into plowshares and sow the seeds so that there is enough food for all.

What is your hosanna today? What are you beseeching the Lord to help you with?

It's an important question for the week ahead, this Holy Week ahead, where we travel with Jesus from his entry to the temple, to the table, to the garden, and to the cross. Steps that cannot be condensed or skipped. For if we want to be an Easter people, we must first be the people of Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday.

And in making this journey, coming to know that we are changed not by the desire to be right, but by the willingness to encounter God and be in relationship with the one who sent Jesus.

Are we willing to ask the same thing?

And are we willing get to know Jesus?

Not just things about Jesus, but Jesus himself,

Jesus Christ who came to show us God's persistence and devotion,  
and continues to invite us into new life, new relationship.

For even as we shout Hosanna, Jesus still says unto us. Follow Thou Me.

Amen.