

**Enter the King** A sermon in response to Mark 11:1-11 and Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 by Rev. Scot McCachren for Hilltop Church, Mendham, NJ, March 24, 2024 (B Palm).

**“Hosanna!** Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! **Hosanna** in the highest heaven!” +++ There’s one thing we know for sure as Christians: **When we shout “Hosanna,” it must be Palm Sunday.** Just saying the word brings to mind people swarming about the entrance to Jerusalem, waving palm branches, and welcoming Jesus into the city. Hosanna! When I was a child, we used to have palm parades and shout out at church – and we’d sing “All Glory, Laud, and Honor” – all just like our kids, and we, still do today. Hosanna! +++ But have you ever wondered what the word “Hosanna” really **means**? “Hosanna.” +++ Are the people simply cheering, “Yay, it’s Jesus!”? ... Or “You Rock!” ... Or maybe, something like “You’re the man, man!”? ... It **feels** like a **victory parade**, doesn’t it? Even the section header in our Bibles makes it feel that way: “Jesus’ **Triumphal** Entry into Jerusalem.” +++ But what are they **actually saying**? What does “Hosanna” **mean**? Where does it come from? And why, throughout the entire New Testament..., why is it only used here, in the Palm Sunday texts? Nowhere else. +++ +++ Well, let’s investigate it together – and see if it helps us see a bigger, more complex, picture of what’s happening here in Mark 11, at the beginning of Holy Week.

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First of all, “Hosanna” is an Aramaic word. That’s the language Jesus and most of the people around him actually spoke. In Aramaic, “Hosanna” means, “Save, I pray.” What’s really interesting is that it’s an outgrowth from the Hebrew text of today’s Psalm 118, at verse 25: “**Aana Yawah HŌsi**” [“**Onnah Yhwah hoshi**”] – or, with rearranged word order: “**HŌsi Aana Yawah**” [“**Hoshi Onnah, Yhwah**”]: **“Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!”** +++ So, when the people cry out, “Hosanna,” they are saying, “Save us, please, O Lord!” ... That’s not quite what we thought, is it? It’s more than a cheer... **It’s a plea.** “Save us, please, O Lord!” +++ +++ +++ In his commentary on Mark, Eugene Boring explains that this part of Psalm 118 was **very** well known to first century Jews. It had been “chanted at all major festivals [for generations, and it would be] familiar to every Jew who visited Jerusalem,” especially during the Passover Festival. ... Even though it literally means “save [us] now,” Hosanna had become a common liturgical cry – ... like “amen,” “hallelujah,” and “kyrie eleison” in our modern worship liturgies.” +++ ... +++ OK, so maybe that **is** more like what we thought: **“Hosanna... Hallelujah!”** +++ **But not so fast!** Bear with me while I take this just a little further with you (then we’ll see what it means for us **today**) +++ Yes, when “Hosanna” is used by itself, it does just mean something like “Hallelujah” – but something else very important gets added to it as Jesus approaches the gates of Jerusalem. **This time**, the very next verse of the Psalm is included in their shout: **“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”** And then, **“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!”**

The Old Testament is full of prophecies that the coming **messiah** will **wear** the crown of David – a royal heir to the throne who will enter Jerusalem to turn the tables on his enemies. Passages like Zechariah 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter **Jerusalem!** Lo, your **king** comes to you; **triumphant and victorious** is he, **humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**” +++ These prophecies will not be forgotten as Jesus Christ makes the last few steps of his journey to Jerusalem. +++ Just think about what a pivotal moment this is in the long history of God’s People... Jesus – the one who **“comes in the name of the Lord,”** riding the foreseen colt, approaches the city. ... +++ Now, in Mark’s account, the ones who are shouting “Hosanna” aren’t on the streets of Jerusalem. In John they are – but not in Mark – and that’s an important distinction. Jesus is still outside the city, near the Mount of Olives. He sends two of his disciples into a village to get the colt for his final push. Then, **“those who went ahead and those who followed** were shouting, **‘Hosanna!’**” These are Jesus’ disciples and a throng of other followers – walking their **messiah** – their **king** – their **savior** – into **the battle for Jerusalem.** “Hosanna! [Save us, please, O Lord!] Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!”

The day is already drawing long when our hero arrives at the gates. After all the cheering and excitement, **THE KING ENTERS** Jerusalem – **alone.** He heads straight to the temple..., goes in..., and looks around at

everything, – sizing it all up with grim resolution as a general might size up his opponent and the battlefield the night before combat begins. Then Jesus leaves the city and retires for the night. He is ready for what the next week will bring. – He’s ready to do battle. – He’s ready to die. – He’s ready to win.

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I wonder if we are as ready as he is. Palm Sunday ushers in a time when Jesus Christ engulfs us in absurdity that stops us in our tracks: The royal heir of David shows up for battle... alone – and with no weapons. A savior God rides... a donkey. >> A king’s crown... punctures wounds into his head. >> Betrayal and denial from ones... who love him. >>> Victory... on a cross. >> Death which leads to life. +++ Debie Thomas ponders these ironies in her essay on this passage. She writes, “These paradoxes are what give Jesus’ story its shape, weight, and texture, calling us at every moment to hold together truths that seem bizarre..., counterintuitive, and ...irreconcilable. On good days,” Thomas continues, “I understand that these paradoxes are precisely what grant my religion its credibility. ... If I live in a world that’s full of pain, mystery, and contradiction, then I need a religion robust enough to bear the weight of that messy world. I need a religion that empowers me, in Richard’s Rohr’s beautiful words, ‘to live in exquisite, terrible humility before reality.’ +++ But the question is: will I choose the humble and the real? Or will I insist on the delusions of empire? Will I accompany Jesus on his ridiculous donkey, honoring the precarious path he has chosen? Or will my impatience and pessimism undermine my journey? +++ In reference to Palm Sunday, Frederick Buechner writes this: ‘Despair and hope. They travel the road to Jerusalem together, as together they travel every road we take — despair at what in our madness we are bringing down on our own heads and hope in him who travels the road with us and for us and who is the only one of us all who is not mad.’ +++ Buechner is right: we ARE mad ... [We are mad] with despair and hope, both, ... so much so... that we don't know what to do with the story of a God who comes... to die... so that we... can live” ... +++ or a KING who ENTERS in triumph, fulfilling ancient prophecies, in order to be tortured and hung upon a cross. +++ ||| +++ It’s a madness that we must feed... and foster – an absurdity to carry back with us each day... into our workplace..., our homes..., and our community.

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ENTER THE KING ... into the holy city – to shouts of “Hosanna! Save us, please, O Lord! Hosanna!”  
ENTER THE KING to do just that: to save us. +++ This Good News means that you have a messiah ...whose grace and power exceed all the twisted torments of this mortal world. +++ You have a king ...who battles on when you stop at the gate and watch him go in alone. +++ You have a God ...whose eternal wisdom holds your contradicting weaknesses and strength, ...your despair and your hope, ...your faith and your doubt... >>> holds it all together with love, and peace, and understanding. +++ You have a savior..., as Thomas writes, who “knows all the reasons your heart cries, ‘Save [me] now!’ and carries those broken, strangled cries to the cross on your behalf.”

Welcome to Holy Week. The KING has ENTERED the gates of the city and night is falling. Expectation is in the air. Jesus Christ is resolute. He is focused. He is ready for what lays ahead. +++ Are you? +++  
“Hosanna!”

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.