

Palm Sunday – 2025
Deuteronomy 32:36-39
Philippians 2:5-11
John 12:12-19

That dude doesn't know what he's talking about. Has anyone ever said that about you? Chances are... Perhaps you've come across someone who was holding forth on a particular subject and it was obvious that the individual was out of his depth. It's not that folks are ignorant or that they enjoy trotting out their half-baked theories only to be ridiculed later. It's more like the things that we think we know aren't actually true. Time tends to shine a rather harsh light on half-baked ideas. But people move on. The difference between the way people remember their words and what their words really were can be like a vista at the Grand Canyon. Most of us find a way to soften our folly. I'm pretty sure that you are like me. It is easy for me to put the best construction on my behavior. It's easy for me to explain my own behavior in the kindest way. It is not always easy for me to do so with others – especially loudmouths, know-it-all loudmouths who don't own up to it when their position craters, when their certainty crashes and burns for all to see.

Palm Sunday is a bit of an enigma. That's because of the light that Good Friday shines on Palm Sunday. Euphoric is the best way to describe Palm Sunday. It was a messianic fervor, an elated spiritual frame of mind that knew for certain that Jesus had come to establish His kingdom, and that is very true. It would've been hard not to be caught up in the moment. The miracles were multiplying. The pieces of the Scriptural puzzle were fitting together with unmistakable precision. The Lord's very person created confidence. He had *such* authority. His teaching stirred the hearts of His audiences far and wide. And now, dead Lazarus has been called from his grave. Four-days-dead; and Laz strode out of the tomb at the behest of the Son of God. "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40). Lazarus, come out. And it was so. There was evening and there was morning when Lazarus walked out of his tomb. It was a new creation. And Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" (Zechariah 9:9; John 12:15).

Hosanna! It is a petition *and* a word of acclamation at the same time. Hosanna in the highest! He has come to save. He is the Son of David. "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (John 12:13). Yes, Jesus is the King of the Jews. Hosanna means "Save, Save us!" But one wouldn't shout that at someone who doesn't have the ability. It comes from the royal psalms, Psalm 118 in particular (Psalm 118:25). They certainly had the right words. But they didn't know what they were talking about. They knew that Jesus was the One. But they didn't apprehend what sort of Messiah Jesus was. Do you? Do you know what sort of Messiah Jesus is? Folks who talk about Christianity without mentioning sacrifice, without mentioning blood and atonement and death alarm me. A cross-less Christianity is a charade, a feel-good spiritualism that is misguided at best and idolatrous at worst. Palm Sunday is an enigma. Quite rightly, the multitude heralded the entrance of the King into the Holy City. But what happened to them?

It is conjecture, but commentators have long said that some in that crowd turned bellicose, turned violent and cruel and equally animated in calling for Jesus to be crucified – "Hosanna" on

Sunday, “Crucify him” on Friday. Didn’t Jesus meet their expectations? Did the Lord of glory disappoint them? Were they expecting a gilded age of political ascendancy? Were they expecting a gilded age of material abundance? Has Christianity disappointed you? Did you expect perpetual spiritual triumph, sinless devotion pouring out of your heart 24/7? Have you become ambivalent about using the gifts that God has given you in service to His church? Are you prone to finding fault with God because you find yourself sometimes being neither hot nor cold? How many of you have struggled with the reality of life in this world, conflicted over your carnal appetites and your obvious awareness of Christ’s call to holy living? How many of you have failed? Has any Christian ever told you, ever promoted the idea that Christians don’t fail?

One of the questions that I hear the most is “how can we discern the truth?” In the next breath, the individual will bring up the fact that the Christian church on earth has way more than 31 flavors. If the individual is cheeky, or perhaps trying to see if I’m real, they’ll ask “What makes y’all so special?” At its core, it’s a good question. How would you answer it? My stock answer is that I’m a Lutheran because I can read. I can be cheeky too. The Bible is our authority. Not tradition, not man’s reason, not contemporary viewpoints on morality or cultural shifts in what is acceptable. The Bible is our authority. Christ is our authority. The Holy Trinity is our authority. The truth is our authority. Those authorities are coterminous. Those authorities are united. Jesus is the Word made flesh. He was unambiguous: “These are the Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39). “No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 20-21). “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16). I could go on (Romans 1:16-17; Matthew 5:17).

In season and out of season, this dynamic word of God is proclaimed in all of its power (2 Timothy 4:2). Sola Scriptura – there is no other authority – God’s Word alone. The Light of Christ shines in this place not because of an LCMS logo but because we preach Christ and Him crucified. The cross makes us wise. Christ’s Word is cruciform. His suffering invades our lives. It cannot be otherwise. The Christian faith is timeless. God does not change. Our need does not change. The power of His Word does not change. We do not add to it (Deuteronomy 4:2). We do not take anything away from it (Revelation 22:18-19). Here we stand! We can do no other. I suspect that those who shouted “Hosanna” were disappointed. Some were heart-broken. The innocent and pure and good and self-giving Lord was handed over to sinful men and they slayed Him. Two men walking from Jerusalem to Emaus on Easter gave voice to their disappointment: “We had hope that he was the one to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). Ultimately, their disappointment was centered on one thing: Jesus was dead. What did their “Hosannas” mean? What do yours mean? To be sure, the vision of the ancients was foggy. Their ability to apprehend the significance of the cross was limited. What about yours?

We are devoted to the task of building strong Christians in this place. Who knows what trouble is going to visit Christ’s church in the years to come. Covid was certainly unexpected. Did God use that time to prune those who’s allegiance was lukewarm? What new thing will come?

“Hosanna” is a remarkable word. It signals an absolute trust in the Lord of the cross. To say “Hosanna” is to recognize that Jesus is risen from the dead. It also recognizes our weakness, our

need, and it does not attempt to hide these truths. Christ has saved you. You know it. His commandments are to be in your mind, your heart, your actions. We will fail. We admit it. We repent and we are absolved by Jesus' authoritative Word. That Word emanates from the cross. His Word has His death and His resurrection in it. He set His face toward Jerusalem. "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). He knew that the Messianic acclamation He received on Palm Sunday wouldn't last. Crucify! Crucify Him! That is both heart-breaking and wondrous. That is *your* Lord on that cross. He suffers there to make you a new creation. And it is so. You hear this Word and faith springs into your being (Romans 10:17). You hear this Word and Christ's life penetrates your own (John 5:24).

Hosanna means all that it can mean as it comes from this holy assembly. Christ is present and He brings His kingdom. Forgiveness, life, and salvation saturate that word – Hosanna! You come to His altar and the present manifestation of His salvation is placed in your mouth. Hosanna! The Lord saves. His glory fills your soul, fills His church. When we speak of His cross, we know what we are talking about. When we speak of His cross we are talking about love, and triumph, and grace, and truth and an eternal dominion. When we speak of His cross we are talking about people from every walk of life, on every continent, of every age, every language. By His cross the Lord Jesus gained everything. It is our fervent hope that the whole world goes after Him (John 12:19).