

April 9, 2017 “Hosanna!” John 12:12-19

It is 5 days until the celebration of the Jewish Passover. If you are Jewish, you have a dream...just once...just once in your life, you would like to be able to celebrate the Passover in the city of Jerusalem. In the ancient world that was a really big dream. There are only two ways to travel on land. You walk or you ride an animal that can carry you...horse, mule, camel. And if you are poor, the only option is to walk. If you live outside of Israel (Judea), it is a major journey that requires a large investment. It is the kind of journey you make once in a life time. Pilgrims went to Israel and Jerusalem making that investment and that sacrifice for over 2,000 years.

The result was that Jerusalem was packed with a combination of locals, Israelis, and pilgrims from as far away as Africa, parts of Europe, and from all over the Roman Empire. The Romans built excellent roads parts of which can be seen today the results of archaeological digs in the Holy Land. They were paved with stone. And they were so heavily traveled you can see ruts worn in the stone pavers by iron rimmed wheels of cargo wagons drawn by oxen or horses.

This is the day. This is the anniversary of that day. It is the first day of the week. Sabbath ended at sundown the night before. So after the quiet, the almost eerie quiet of Sabbath there is the hustle and bustle of traffic, of business, and last minute arrivals of pilgrims to Jerusalem swelling the numbers of people in evidence everywhere. And the word has reached the city...word of mouth...people talking to people...Jesus is coming. And if you are a resident of Judea you have heard about Jesus, HIS ministry in Galilee for the balance of 3 years has been that successful and has

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had that kind of effect. And if you didn't know about Jesus there were lots of people willing to tell the story all over again...this guy Lazarus died and was buried. Jesus arrived on the scene (HE was a friend of the family) and HE raised Lazarus from the dead. They say you could smell the decaying body...but Lazarus is alive. Jesus commanded him to come out of the tomb...and Lazarus is alive.!

You roll it all together and suddenly you have one of the biggest events in memory. People head for the gates of the Holy City just to catch a glimpse of Jesus. Some say HE is the Messiah! It is all of a sudden the biggest thing to happen in the Jewish world. If it is possible you want to see HIM. And the Pharisees participate. Number one they want to keep an eye on things. Number two they are worried about the reaction of the Romans...they do not like public demonstrations of any kind. And number three, they know all about Jesus ministry. At the very least HE makes them uncomfortable. At the other end of the spectrum, they see HIM as a threat. One thing they have learned. They, cannot control HIM, and the poorest of the people...they adore HIM.

You roll all of those details together, and there is suddenly one of the biggest gatherings of Jews at one spot inside the walls of Jerusalem, that can be remembered. They greet Jesus with Palm branches. They wave them in the air. They lay them in the streets. And they do what crowds always do. They make noise. They shout, "Hosanna!" They shout, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" They shout, "Blessed is the King of Israel!"

No wonder the Pharisees are concerned about the Roman reaction. Blessed is the King of Israel? Uh...that is supposed to be Herod's job. The Romans gave it to him in the hopes that a nominal

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Jewish ruler would pacify a stubborn and difficult, conquered people. Clearly it has not. Just under the surface is this desire that threatens to bubble up and bubble over that Judea should be free....that God's choice of King (the messiah qualifies) should rule this province and send the Romans home. That is treason...fomenting rebellion. The Pharisees understand that a Roman reaction will cost everyone...including themselves.

I have made this point before. The prophecies concerning the Messiah, things like, HIS arriving riding on the colt of a donkey...their King are found in Zechariah 9:9. This is not identified as a prophecy about the Messiah, by Christians after the fact of Easter, it is a prophecy identified by the Jewish community of faith. They long for its fulfillment. And on this Sunday they believe they see it coming true. And the Pharisees are on the verge of panic.

“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” The phrase is straight out of Psalm 118. Clearly a lot of those present were shouting it. They were recognizing Jesus as the Messiah and they were celebrating HIS coming into Jerusalem at this moment as a moment of divine appointment. The cry is that God is taking control of the streets of Jerusalem. Again reason for the Pharisees to fear what the Romans might do in reaction. And to make matters worse, the Roman Procurator, Pontius, Pilatus is in Jerusalem for one reason. To deal with public disorder which might occur during the Passover celebrations. He is here. He will hear about this. He will do something, because he is here to personally take charge. If they really think Jesus is the Messiah, can rioting fail to unfold?

The crowds cry something else. “Hosanna”. It is Hebrew. It means save. It is a cry out of the hunger of the soul. Save me. Jesus save us. Save us from poverty. Save us from crushing

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taxes. Save us from the Romans. Saves us from our illnesses and diseases. Save us from our sins. Save us from the cruelty of the world. Save us from our hopelessness. Save me. Save us. We are perishing. Bring the love of God to bear on our lives. Change everything. It is a prayer. And it is not just their prayer in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. It is our prayer. It is our prayer in 2017. April the 9th. It is a current cry. Lord Jesus, save me. Save us all.

You have heard me say this before. What I love about the Gospel accounts is what the disciples of Jesus have the honesty to say about themselves. John is an old man. As am I. And what John says is this: “At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified, did they realize these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him.” They saw all the miracles. They tell us they were there. They overflowed with joy at the reception that greeted them as they entered the Holy City. And John simply says...we did not understand what was happening. We had heard all the lessons. HE warned us what would happen in Jerusalem. At that moment we thought it was impossible. We basked in the glory of that moment of spontaneous popular approval. How could anything go wrong?

Only after the unfolding of the whole of this last week would they begin to understand. John was probably the closest friend, the dearest friend that Jesus had during these three years of ministry. John says it was not just that Peter did not understand, it was not just Peter that did not get it...none of us got it. None of us realized. None of us understood. I, John, did not understand it. From beginning to end it was about that one word. Hosanna. That week, that day. Hosanna! From Bethlehem to Calvary it was about that one word. Hosanna! Save me. And even when we joined in and shouted

it at the top of our lungs...we did not understand what we were saying.

The streets were filled with people. They were shouting and waving Palm branches and demonstrating. They have heard the stories and the rumours of miracles. The blind have been given sight. The deaf have been enabled to hear. Captives of demonic forces have been set free. All they want is one more miracle. Save us. Save us from our pain. Save me. And John says not one of us understood. That is precisely why Jesus came to this Holy City. That is precisely why HE came to Jerusalem. To do it. To give the gift of saving, the only way it could be given. He knew. He understood. We were good students. We were good witnesses. But we did not understand. No matter what we believed we did not understand until...later. And even then some of us took more time than others. And one of us never got it at all. Or maybe he was the first to... On that Sunday, entering the city, beautiful moment, none of us understood.

And there were some who saw the same things we saw, and heard the same things we heard, and all they understood was that their control of things such as it was. was slipping through their fingers. Spinning out of control. The Pharisees. They said to one another... "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world is going after him!" They perhaps understood least of all. Hosanna...save us.

Let us pray;

Lord our God, Saviour, life breathing Spirit. Thank you for understanding our deep, soul deep need. Thank you for entering the city. Thank you for loving us beyond our ability yet to

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understand. Thank you for the pain you endured. The commitment of which you were the evidence. For hearing the prayer, hosanna, for being there for us. Amen