

Pastor Chris Matthis
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Palm Sunday
Saturday, March 24th, 2018 (Observed)
Sunday, March 25th, 2018

Sermon: Save Us
Text: John 12:12-19

Focus: Jesus came to save us from our sins.

Function: That they would admit their need for a Savior.

Structure: Story-Applied

Locus: “I believe that Jesus Christ...has redeemed me...a lost and condemned person...” (SC, 2nd Article of Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. “Hosanna!” cried the crowds on Palm Sunday. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (John 12:13, ESV).¹ *Hosanna* is a special word. In Hebrew it’s a word and a prayer all rolled into one, for *Hosanna* means “Save us!”² As the Passover pilgrims waved their palm branches and hailed Jesus as the Messiah, they called out “Hosanna! Save us, Lord!”

But what did they want to be saved from? The Romans? No doubt, that was the main idea. As a Davidic king (“Son of David,” Matt. 21:9) and the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, Jesus was supposed by his followers to raise an army and drive out the Roman occupiers who imposed taxes and pagan practices upon the people of Israel. They hailed him as a conquering king at his so-called “triumphal” entry into Jerusalem—even though he signaled otherwise by coming “humble and mounted on a donkey” instead of a stomping steed (Zech. 9:9). And when Jesus’ disciples took up arms in the Garden of Gethsemane to prevent his arrest, he told them to

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

² Hebrew: הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא (cf. Ps. 118:25).

put away their swords. That certainly doesn't sound like the military tour de force that the crowds expected.

“Hosanna! Save us!” What else did they want to be saved from? A corrupt priesthood? Jesus had cleansed the Temple and reclaimed it as a house of prayers instead of a den of thieves. Did they want Jesus to save them from hypocrisy?

“Hosanna! Save us!” What about rescue from sickness and disease? Jesus was a famous miracle worker who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and even raised the dead. In fact, John tells us that many of the people in the crowd came to see Jesus because they had heard about how he raised Lazarus from the dead just a few days earlier (cf. John 10:17-18). Did they want Jesus to save them from pain and suffering?

“Hosanna! Save us!” Put yourself in the crowd on Palm Sunday. What do *you* want Jesus to save *you* from? Islamic terrorists, North Korea, school bullies, Internet trolls, or other enemies? What about chronic pain, cancer, or the world AIDS epidemic? What about poverty, hunger, or global warming? Maybe you want Jesus to save you from the liberals—or the conservatives (however you define those terms)! Or something more personal and close to home: temptation, drug or alcohol addiction, adultery, or abuse? Perhaps there is something even more existential that you need to be delivered from: worry, doubt, or fear?

“Hosanna!” we cry on Palm Sunday, without realizing the true meaning of the words we say or the deeper threats from which we need to be rescued. “Hosanna! Save us!”

The great disappointment of Holy Week is that Jesus did *not* save the disciples from the ruthless Romans, hypocritical priests, or even their dread diseases. Instead he ended up dead on the cross. The same crowds that hailed him with Hosannas on Sunday cried for his crucifixion on Friday. “Crucify him, crucify him!” (John 19:6).

But that doesn't mean Jesus didn't save them—or us. In fact, that is the very reason he rode into Jerusalem: to die on the cross as the Savior of the world. As Jesus hanged on the cross, bleeding and gasping for air, the priests, the soldiers, passersby, and the criminals taunted him: “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matt. 27:40). “He saved others; he cannot save himself... Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him” (Matt. 27:42). “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” (Luke 23:37). In other words, even from the cross, the people continued to shout “Hosanna,” albeit with biting sarcasm.

Hosanna! Save us! Amazingly, that is precisely *why* Jesus did *not* come down from the cross. He came to save us, not merely from earthly enemies, danger, or disaster, but from the greatest enemies of all: sin, death, and the devil. Jesus saves. That's what he does, and that's even what his name means: “The Lord saves.” Before his birth, the angel told Joseph to call him Jesus because “he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Jesus came to save us from our sins. Ultimately, he saves us from *ourselves*.

But there is something threatening about the idea of a Savior. To believe that Jesus saves, we must first admit that we need to be saved from something and someone. We have to humble ourselves and admit our inadequacy and inability to save ourselves, as well as the failure of all other methods we have tried. Maybe you are not ready to confess your sin, or perhaps you are just unwilling, like the priests and people at Jesus' crucifixion. You may even feel tempted to taunt God and make a mockery of Jesus, regarding him as just another failed Messiah. Yet despite our pride and lack of self-awareness, we cannot change the fact that we are sinners in need of saving. We need a Savior. Without Christ we are doomed—and damned. But Jesus

saves. He saves his people from their sins. He saves you from your sins and me from my sins. And he wants to save every single person on the face of this planet (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

Yet that does not mean that God doesn't care about all the other things we need to be saved from. For in Revelation 7 we have a picture of another crowd, "a great multitude that no one could number" from every nation and tribe, language and race (Rev. 7:9). They wear white robes and wave palm branches—just like Palm Sunday—and they cry out, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:10). Just like Palm Sunday, the people of God talk about salvation. But on the Last Day they celebrate the accomplished fact of their salvation, which is why they no longer need to cry, "Hosanna!"

At the end of the chapter, we receive this wonderful assurance that on the Last Day of Christ's return, we "shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike [us], nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be [our] shepherd, and he will guide [us] to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes" (Rev. 7:16-17). Praise God! Jesus saves. So on this Palm Sunday, at the start of this Holy Week, we wave our palm branches and pray, "Hosanna! Save us, Lord!" And he does, and he will. In the name of Jesus. Amen.