

Pastor Chris Matthis
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Palm Sunday
Saturday, April 9th, 2022
Sunday, April 10th, 2022

Sermon: Jesus Saves (Hosanna!)
Text: John 12:12-19; Psalm 118

Focus: Jesus came to save us from our sins.

Function: That they would look to Christ for salvation.

Structure: Story Framed

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

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. You’re driving down I-70 through the-middle-of-nowhere Kansas when a large billboard comes into view. There is a picture of Jesus on one side of the billboard and on the other simply two words: JESUS SAVES. “Jesus saves.” That’s it. Nothing more, nothing less. Yet as you continue driving, questions pop into your head. Whom or what does Jesus save? The billboard doesn’t say. And, ordinarily, when you save someone or something, you save them from something or someone *else*—from an enemy, let’s say, or disaster or death or disease or even just embarrassment. So from what does Jesus save whomever or whatever? Again, the billboard doesn’t say. You’re only left with part of the message—part of the *story*.

Similar ponderings fill my head when I hear the cheer of the crowd in today's Gospel lesson: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (John 12:13, ESV).¹

Hosanna is a Hebrew word that means "Save us, please!" or "Save us now!" (הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא). This word pops up in Psalm 118, the last of the *Hallel* Psalms that Jewish pilgrims sang on festival days. And so, as the crowds cut their palm branches and hailed Jesus as king, no doubt they sang verse 25: "Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!" (Ps. 118:25).

The shout of *hosanna* by the crowd on Psalm Sunday was more than a joyous "hurray." It was a prayer. *Hosanna!* Save us, Lord! Save us, *Jesus!* For *you* are the King of Israel!

But from what did the Jewish crowd want saving? From poverty? Perhaps. From the hypocrisy of the Jewish priests and other religious leaders? Almost certainly. From the Roman soldiers occupying their homeland, the holy land of Israel? Without a doubt, yes! The crowds

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

heard that Jesus had raised the man Lazarus from the dead. And if Jesus could do that, what else could he do? Better phrased: what could he *not* do? Nothing was impossible for their Messiah! Now the time was at hand to drive the oppressor from the land and restore David's throne. Now was the time for salvation—at least in the small-minded, political way that the people envisioned it. *Hosanna!* Save us, Lord! Jesus, save us.

From what do *you* want to be saved, dear Christian friends? No doubt, you have a list in your own head. Perhaps you want to be saved from debt or a dead-end job. You want to be saved from bad news the next time you go to visit your doctor. You want to be saved from the heartache and heartbreak of a bad marriage or an estranged child. Perchance you want to be saved from the liberal lawlessness that has taken hold of our country. Maybe you need to be saved from all those things—or something else entirely different. Regardless of your sorry state, you see that billboard, you see the Messiah coming on a donkey. So you wave your palm branch and cry out, “*Hosanna!* Save us, Lord! Jesus, save us.”

And Jesus *does* save. That's what his name means: Jesus, *Ἰησοῦς*, Jesús, Yeshua, Joshua... No matter how you slice it or dice it, Jesus' name means "salvation." As the angel told Joseph after Mary conceived the Christ child, "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). He will save his people from their sins. JESUS SAVES. His name says who he is and what he does. JESUS SAVES. He saves us from our sins.

Jesus came to save us from our sins. He didn't come to snap his fingers and make all of our problems go away. In the Upper Room, Jesus would tell his disciples, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b, NIV). In this world, trouble is sure to come. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt 6:34). Today has enough trouble of its own. That's what *Jesus* tells us. He doesn't stand before us with permed hair and a pearly white perma-smile promising that we can have our best life now if we just believe hard enough, pray hard enough, or obey well enough. The world is *full* of trouble!

Yet the ultimate source of all of our troubles is *sin*. We suffer because of sin. We hurt because of sin. We hurt *others* because of sin. And we *die* because of sin. Because of sin, we're in a world of hurt!

But I have Good News for you: Jesus came to save his people from their sins. Jesus came to save *us* from *our* sins! Jesus came to take our guilt and shame and pain to the cross. He poured out his blood for your forgiveness. And after they took his body down from the cross, all that pain and guilt—all that *sin!*—remained there nailed to the cross. And it stays there still. Jesus came to rescue you, to take away your sin—to *save* you from your sins. JESUS SAVES. That's who he is, that's what he does.

And *because* Jesus saves, and because Holy Week does not end at the cross but at the empty tomb, we can look forward to the Day when Christ will come again to rescue us from death itself. For on that Day, he will call us forth from the dust and raise our bodies from the dead. He will usher in a new age with a new heaven and a new earth in which there will be no more pain, no more sickness, no more death... and no more sin. That's when all our troubles will come to an end.

Jesus saved us from our sins when he died and rose again. And he will save us when he *comes* again. JESUS SAVES. And so we pray and cry, "*Hosanna!* Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.