

FIRST LESSON: Psalm 118:19-29  
SECOND LESSON: Mark 11:1-11  
March 28, 2021  
PALM SUNDAY

***“We Cry Hosha Na!”***  
Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

Jesus and his disciples had come from Jericho. It’s about an 18-mile journey, uphill. We could not do this in one day. They most assuredly did. But it would have taken all day. About two miles outside of Jerusalem were the villages of Bethphage and Bethany. Bethany was where Martha, Mary and Lazarus lived. Bethphage has disappeared and we no longer know where it was, but it was obviously enroute, because it was into tiny Bethphage that Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

That’s somewhat outrageously risky. It would be like one of us going and finding a car with the keys in it and trying to just drive away. Of course, the disciples were stopped and asked, but when they said, “The Lord has need of it,” they were allowed to take the colt. We don’t know if Jesus had humanly pre-arranged this or if it had been divinely pre-arranged.

They brought the donkey colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it for him to sit on. In Matthew’s gospel we hear of two donkeys, likely a mother and colt. Most donkeys under the age of two never went anywhere without their mothers. But why did it have to be a donkey on which no one had ever ridden? And why a donkey?

The intention behind finding an animal that had never been ridden may be related to the idea that any animal used for a sacred purpose must never have first been used for an ordinary purpose. And while a donkey seems an odd choice to us, to the people of Jesus’ time donkeys were noble beasts. Kings and judges rode on donkeys. A king who came riding on a horse intended to wage war, but a king riding on a donkey came in peace. The Messianic king of peace prophesied in Zechariah came riding on the back of a donkey. According to the prophecy, he will rule over a universal kingdom protecting the weak and proclaiming peace to all nations.

We don’t know if the people in the crowds shouting, spreading their cloaks on the road and waving branches were pilgrims who came with Jesus or people coming out from Jerusalem. Since the donkey was retrieved about two miles from Jerusalem it makes sense to assume that they were pilgrims and immediate followers of Jesus. And what they shouted out was “Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

The people shouted hosanna, and they quoted Psalm 118 which we read this morning, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Originally this Psalm of praise may have been used in the fall for the Feast of Tabernacles, but this particular psalm had already been chosen by Jesus when he spoke of the stone the builders rejected. In the original interpretation that stone was the nation of Israel itself, rejected by all the other great nations surrounding it. Jesus used it to refer to himself. As for the word "hosanna", that is actually two words. Hosanna is hosha na—or "save us!" If they had been shouting hallelujah, which is also two words and means "praise God" the Romans wouldn't have been as nervous. Hosha na was different. About 167 years earlier another grand entrance had been celebrated with palm branches, the palm symbolizing Judea, prosperity and victory. A Syrian king had conquered Israel and attempted to wipe out the Jewish religion. He was driven out under the leadership of Judas Maccabaeus, an event now commemorated at Hanukah. When Maccabaeus entered Jerusalem as a deliverer he too was greeted with shouts of "Hosha na!" and the waving of palms. The military undertone had never quite disappeared.

Historians know that the only reason the Maccabees had been successful at the time was because the major powers were too busy fighting each other to bother with Israel. Israel was like an annoying flea. If a conquering nation was paying attention, which Rome was, the "flea" didn't have a chance. But the Zealots were desperate to drive out the Romans and they wouldn't have wanted to hear this. They were convinced that God was about to send them an all-powerful Messiah who would drive out the Romans and establish Israel as a world power. This vision was so powerful that a generation after Christ there would come another man who would enter on the back of a donkey to shouts of praise. His name was Bar Kokhba. The rebellion under Bar Kokhba resulted in utter devastation, the type of crushing devastation we see in the ruins of Syria today. Having a just cause does not guarantee victory.

Did the people who declared "Hosha na! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" believe Jesus was coming to be a military deliverer? Probably many of them did. Only Jesus' disciples knew that there was more to this story, and even they had trouble taking in what Jesus told them. But it was not necessarily the same crowd shouting "Hosha na!" that later shouted "Crucify him!" That crowd, the second group, was well infiltrated. It was common practice to have agents manipulating public opinion and agitating and the chief priests and scribes would have used this tactic. Their version of social media was more hands on than ours.

The gospels have different reports as to what happened next. In John's gospel the cleansing of the Temple does not happen here at all, but at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In Matthew and Luke Jesus goes directly to the Temple upon arriving and carries out the cleansing of the Temple. But Mark is the earliest gospel, and I suspect the most accurate. This had been a very long day. According to Mark, "Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve." Having come 18 miles already, Jesus and the

twelve then left the crowded city and walked two more miles out to Bethany where they could rest, eat and regroup. He made an inspection tour the first day, and carried out his plan the next.

The crowds had shouted “hosha na!” that first Palm Sunday. They rejoiced that God had sent them a king. But he was not the kind of king they had wanted. For many he is still not the kind of king they are looking for. And to be honest, we all want immediate here and now answers. We want prosperity and security. We want to triumph over our foes. We want to be vaccinated today, the coronavirus to go away, the problems at the border to disappear, gun violence to suddenly stop and cancer to be cured. We want equal education for all, the global challenges of pollution and climate change to be solved, and a just and happy world. God wants these things too, but God knows that the only way to accomplish these things on our time schedule would be to remove free will and human responsibility from the picture. **God is apparently not willing to do that.** We might question the wisdom of a god who made a world full of creatures able to choose bad as well as good, but ultimately that doesn’t get us anywhere.

Instead, we see Jesus, God’s son, entering a city in peace but declaring that he is the Messiah by the way he does so. We see Jesus, calm, and in charge, but also well aware that this would be the last week of his life on earth. We see a different kind of savior, one that frustrates us too because we are not much different from the people of Jesus’ time. God in God’s wisdom sent Jesus in answer to our cries for help, to bring salvation to our souls and renewal to our minds and hearts through the Holy Spirit. Jesus came to set us right with God and right with one another. We cry hosha na, and Jesus is God’s answer. Not our way, but God’s. Amen.

Psalm 118:19-29

- 19 Open for me the gates of the righteous;  
I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.
- 20 This is the gate of the Lord  
through which the righteous may enter.
- 21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me;  
you have become my salvation.
- 22 The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;
- 23 the Lord has done this,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
- 24 The Lord has done it this very day;  
let us rejoice today and be glad.
- 25 Lord, save us!  
Lord, grant us success!
- 26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
From the house of the Lord we bless you.
- 27 The Lord is God,  
and he has made his light shine on us.

With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession  
up to the horns of the altar.

**28** You are my God, and I will praise you;  
you are my God, and I will exalt you.

**29** Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.

Mark 11:1-11

**11** As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, **2** saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. **3** If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

**4** They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, **5** some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?”**6** They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. **7** When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. **8** Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. **9** Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,  
“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

**10** “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

**11** Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.