

Shout Hosanna!

Palm Sunday COVID, Yr A

Well, here we are on the strangest Palm Sunday of our lives!! Someone on social media recently commented that this was the Lentiest Lent they had ever Lented, to which someone else responded that it might be the Holiest Holy Week we have ever Holied!! In any case, it's good to be together – as together as we can be. But it's weird and it's strange. And we're grieving and we're anxious.

However, we came out to the parade today, even though we didn't have our usual palm branches and we couldn't process down Bloor Street or through our beloved church building. I'm sad about that. I'm also so happy we're together.

And in the midst of all these mixed feelings and mess, I have a question: I'm wondering what it is that brought us to the parade **today?**

I'm pretty sure it wasn't that you needed more screen time!

Maybe you're bored, and you've already walked the dog twice this morning.

Maybe it's because it's too early for Netflix or a movie.

Maybe you come to Palm Sunday every year and this year wasn't going to be different – after all we're committed friends of Jesus and this is the first day of the holiest week of our year.

But whatever it was that brought you here on this Palm Sunday, in the Year of Our Lord, 2020, I think I can safely say that today **we are more like those first parade goers who lined the streets into Jerusalem than we have been in our whole lives** – or at least for a very long time.

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The pandemic that's gripping the world by the throat helps us to step into the shoes of the folk who came out to watch Jesus enter their holy City. They were people who knew the dread of diseases for which there was no vaccine nor cure. They were people who experienced anxiety and fatigue around the daily grind of making ends meet, of paying crushing taxes, of enduring tragedy and trauma caused by war and upheaval in a time without the grace of social safety nets. They were people desperate for political and social change, having lived under a foreign power for about a century. (Imagine another 96 years of Donald Trump!!)

If we could scan the faces of that crowd, what would we see?

I think we would see deep lines on their faces, lines carved by despair and depression - and anxiety and fear.

But we would also see the twinkles of excitement and hope and resilience and even defiance. This was a crowd eager for change, exuberant about the arrival of the famous prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.

On their faces we would see a passionate yearning for a new and better tomorrow.

We would see a manifesto for revolution.

We would see a hope beyond hope for their salvation. Salvation by the long-promised, long-awaited Messiah.

Which is why they were all shouting “Hosanna.”

Hosanna. A Hebrew word that means save us.

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As Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day on a donkey, the crowd was pleading with him. Pleading to be saved. They were people at the end of their ropes. They were people who absolutely grasped the gravity of their human predicament. People who realized that only by connecting to something bigger and more powerful could they feel strong enough to endure and flourish. They knew their need for God. And so they were shouting Hosanna at the top of their lungs and with all their might. “Lord, please save us.”

And there was God incarnate in their midst, right there, for some of them less than 2 metres away, slowly riding on a donkey.

Now we've all heard lots of homilies about the misunderstanding that many of them harboured about the kind of Messiah that would come. The ancient expectation was that a king would come and restore the kingdom of Israel, booting out the Roman oppressors. The expectation was that this would be a **kick-butt Messiah**, much like a 20th century superhero, or in their terms **a noble successor to the throne of David. A mighty champion. A triumphant leader in battle.**

We, as 21st century disciples, know that this is not exactly how it worked out, but today I feel that I empathize more than ever with their longings. Don't we also want a Messiah who will come when we shout Hosanna and kick COVID 19 to the curb, along with the inevitable recession or depression? Don't we want a Messiah who will restore our jobs, and summer vacations, and most of all raise those who have died during this pandemic?

And what do we get? Well, since we know the end of the story, we can answer with trust and gratitude and awe: **we get the Messiah we need.** The Messiah who rides into our embattled city, not on a stallion nor atop a tank, not in a protective, pristine limo, but on a lowly donkey. We get the Messiah who comes in flesh and blood, open to the droplets of the virus, without a Hazmat suit or n95mask (I'm being metaphorical here and not suggesting these are not very good and necessary things). We get the Messiah who comes simply **to be with us**, to share the chaos and tragedy and pain of COVID 19 with us, abandoning his divine immunity. We get the Messiah who refuses to give into the powers of Empire, of sin and greed and hate and evil, and thereby suffers the consequences of that loving defiance, but

who eventually kicks it all to the curb leaving the tomb empty and God's people saved.

The writer of Psalm 118 alludes to the coming of the Lord through the gates of righteousness and gives thanks for the marvel of our salvation:

Beginning at verse 24 the psalmist writes:

On this day the Lord has acted;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Hosannah, Lord, hosanna!
Lord, send us now success.

Did you hear that? The word hosanna also means, **send us now success.**

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My friends, today more than ever before, we're feeling our need for salvation and that is why we have come out to the parade. We have come out to line the streets into our city to shout Hosanna! **We shout: Please Lord, save us! Please Lord, send us now success!**

And so after every line that I now say, I invite you to shout this word with me:

To the droplets of this virus, let us shout hosanna.

To the economic pain that is and will be afflicting us. Hosanna!

To the scientists scrambling 24/7 to find a cure. Hosanna!

To the researchers toiling around the clock to develop and test a vaccine. Hosanna!

To all our healthcare and essential service workers taking daily risks for us. Hosanna!

To our leaders, volunteers, caregivers, artists, musicians, writers and poets. Hosanna!

To the saints all around and before us, inspiring and cheering us. Hosanna!

To our Messiah, who comes on a donkey, hangs on a tree, and bursts from the tomb. Hosanna!

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