

Palmarum

St. John 12:12-19

April 5, 2020

“Hosanna!” cried the crowds as Jesus entered Jerusalem.

“Hosanna!” It means, “Save us now!”

We can probably resonate with that. Every election we look for a savior. Every illness we look for a savior.

And now, well, “Save us now!” means we just want things to get back to normal. You’ve probably heard people say, “When this is over, we should...”. You’ve probably said, “When this is over, I’m going to...”.

We want things to get back to normal. But should we?

The first Christians weren’t looking back. They were looking forward.

Forward-thinking doesn’t mean liturgical, doctrinal, or sacramental innovations. Forward thinking doesn’t mean becoming more like the world.

For the first Christians, the cry *Hosanna!* expressed the longing to be freed from this world. It shows up in the earliest liturgy we have, in a first-century church-handbook called the *Didache*. At the communion, the Pastor is to pray like this:

Remember, Lord, Thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in Thy love, and gather it from the four winds, sanctified for Thy kingdom which Thou hast prepared for it; for Thine is the power and the glory for ever. Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to the Son of David! If any one is holy, let him come; if any one is not so, let him repent. Maranatha. [*Didache* X.5f]

“Gather [the church] from the four winds” – from all the scattered places of the world, from every place where the contagion has spread – gather us and sanctify us: make us holy. We are not asking for control of any earthly kingdom. We long for a different kingdom, not of our design but one where God is the Sovereign.

"Let grace come, and let this world pass away." How can we want things to get back to normal? Was normal good? We were dying, we just weren't thinking about it. We were moving along with all of our plans and agendas. Praise God they've been disrupted. It allows us to realize that they were never permanent. As disciples of Jesus, we are walking the road to the kingdom of God, not seeking to gain a kingdom here. "Let this world pass away"! "Hosanna to the Son of David!" He is our King, He is the longing of our heart, He is our joy.

We don't need a return to normal. What was normal needed to change. We need to return to what made us Christians in the first place: Repentance, and reconciliation in the cross of Jesus.

Way back in 2005, I shattered my ankle playing softball. I had a long recovery, and preached many sermons while sitting. A mentor of mine wrote to me, "When you can't kneel, you have to kneel in your heart."

As I thought about Holy Week without the whole congregation gathered, I thought it still important that those participating at home could still see the procession, and follow the cross with their hearts. The Palm Sunday procession teaches us that we follow Jesus as a new and different kind of savior from the ones we're always looking for.

If this stay-at-home order ever ends, we can't go back to normal. Holy Week calls us to no longer accept the normal. Don't accept jobs and prosperity as the meaning of your life. Don't accept ever-increasing markets and retirement plans as your goal. Don't accept sin as normal.

When next you come to Divine Service, notice where you sing *Hosanna!* It follows the call to leave this world behind: "*Lift up your hearts. We lift them up unto the Lord.*" "Let grace come, and this world pass away." *Maranatha.* It's Aramaic for, "Come, Lord." More than a table prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus" is the prayer for an end to this world of death and corruption, this world of contagion and fear.

Not only to the ancient Jews, but to you the prophecy rings out: **"Do not fear!" "Your king comes to you."**

Why were the crowds singing that first Palm Sunday? Because they saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead. They heard the words of Jesus, "Lazarus, come forth!"

The Words of Jesus have power. No contagion can quarantine them. Jesus has the power over death. The words are for you: "Do not fear!"

Let's never go back to normal. Let's remember that the world is filled with pestilence, but we have a King with the antidote. Do not fear. Your King comes to you. Your king dies for you. Hosanna to the Son of David. Let grace come, and this world pass away. +INJ+