

Hosanna

Mark 1:1-11
March 25, 2018

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

These words that the people shouted as they greeted Jesus come from the one hundred and eighteenth Psalm. That Psalm begins with the writer saying, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." The Psalm ends with the same words. The verses in between talk about the Lord answering us when we cry out in anguish. The writer talks about the Lord being with us, and if the Lord is with us, what can anyone do to us? The writer goes on to say it is better to take refuge in the Lord, and the Lord is our strength and our song. The writer proclaims, "I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done." It is near the end of that Psalm where we read the words the people shouted as they welcomed Jesus. "O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. From the house of the Lord we bless you."

Jesus rode into town. This is the Psalm the people thought of.

As I have done most every Palm Sunday, I want to describe the setting that day—that week—when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Jerusalem and the temple area then was kind of like...well, kind of like Times Square in New York City on New Year's Eve. Or—bringing it closer to home—Jerusalem and the temple area then was kind of like St. Paul and West Seventh Street on Saint Patrick's Day. You know how that is. The Irish—of which I am one—and those who just like a good party gather in downtown St. Paul. St. Paul has a fairly rich Irish heritage. West Seventh is pretty much shut down. There is a parade. There is a lot of revelry taking place.

So what happens is security is beefed up just a bit. There are more than the usual number of police officers patrolling the streets. There is a certain level of peace that must be maintained. With such a big crowd, things can get out of hand. Each year there are a few arrests that have been made.

Well...when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on what we now call Palm Sunday, it was around the start of the Passover. Passover was—and still is, of course—a big celebration for Jews. Passover...Pentecost...two of their big days. Jews from all over wanted to be in Jerusalem for the big event. Many travelled a great distance to be there. Sacrifices were made during the Passover. People coming from great distances did not bring their sacrificial animals with them. They just purchased them in Jerusalem. Sellers looking to make a buck set up booths in the temple area. They sold animals and stuff. They exchanged money for the out-of-towners. The day after Jesus arrived he drove those folks out of the temple.

Anyway, the city was crowded. Overcrowded. As you know, the city of Jerusalem and all of Israel was under the control of Rome. One thing Rome always guarded against was rioting among the Jews. There had been a few outbreaks. There were the zealots who were always trying to stir up trouble. And with the city so full—and with the people there to celebrate their deliverance from Egypt—Rome was always concerned about a massive uprising. To guard against that, the emperor sent reinforcements into the city. He beefed up security. So on one end of the city this battalion of soldiers rode in from Rome on horseback. During the week, they patrolled the streets.

This was the setting when—from the direction of the Mount of Olives—Jesus rode into

town on one donkey...a colt. I trust this contrast is not lost on us.

So we know the story well. Jesus was approaching Jerusalem for the final time. We know from the Gospel of John that he had been in Jerusalem for the Passover at least twice before. This third time was the end of the journey that began with Jesus inviting the people to deny themselves and take up their own cross and follow him. This last journey would end at the cross.

Jesus told a couple of his disciples to go on ahead of him into the city and find a colt. The colt had never been ridden. We know from Matthew's Gospel and from the book of Zechariah that this colt was the foal of a donkey. So when Jesus rode into town, he was not even sitting on a mature donkey. Jesus' feet probably dragged along the ground.

So the two disciples found this colt. They brought it to Jesus. Jesus rode that animal into town. Soldiers coming into the city from Rome to keep the peace. Jesus arriving on a donkey to bring peace. We read in Luke's Gospel that as Jesus approached Jerusalem, he cried...and he said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace...."

Jesus rode into town. The people welcomed him with shouts of, "Hosanna!" That was a political term in that day. The people were calling on Jesus to save them. "Save us now," they were shouting. They wanted Jesus to do for them what the one hundred and eighteenth Psalm, from which they quoted, said.

This week that began with people shouting "Hosanna" ended with people shouting "crucify him".

So what is our takeaway from all this? I have confessed that there have been some things on which I have had a change of mind. There was a time when I thought and preached that these people who welcomed Jesus with "Hosanna" were the same people who a few days later shouted for Jesus to be crucified. Nope. The mockery of a trial for Jesus mostly took place in

the middle of the night. Most of the "Hosanna" folks would have been asleep. Still, the folks who welcomed Jesus did not exactly expect that Jesus would just surrender to the authorities and then die.

Two groups. Two celebrations, if you will. The "Hosanna" party. The "crucify him" party. Which party will we attend? More than that, Jesus said through tears, "If you only knew this day what brings peace...." So today—this day—what will bring us peace? What will bring you peace today?

What is peace? Peace is a period of no conflict...a time of no war. Peace is also freedom from disturbance. It is inner tranquility. Peace is not having to worry about being attacked or oppressed by our enemies. Real peace is not having any enemies. The people in Jerusalem that day were thinking of peace as not having to worry about Rome any longer. No fear of oppression. No enemy.

After Jesus entered Jerusalem—long about Thursday of that final week—he met with his disciples. They had that final meal. He told them many things around that table. One of the things he told them was, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." So Jesus gives peace. The peace he gives is not like what the world gives. See, the only peace the world can offer is the absence of conflict...the absence of enemies, and the world is not doing a very good job at that. So we have troubled hearts. But the peace Jesus gives, which is not like what the world gives, calms our hearts. At least, that is what Jesus said. What is this peace?

We are studying the book of Romans now in our Wednesday evening Bible study. At the end of the seventh chapter of the book of Romans, Paul talked about this war that raged inside of him. Those were the words he used. Check it out...the twenty-third verse of the seventh chapter. And the war raging inside of him was this battle between good and bad...evil. Simple as that.

I can identify. I think most of us here can. I mean...do you ever...you know just want to do good all the time? Who doesn't want to do good all the time? Career criminals...sure. But most of us want to be good...don't we? But we sin. The struggle with sin is very real. For some it is a very powerful battle.

Anyone ever struggle with a particular sin?

Anyone struggling now? Doesn't have to be some big ticket kind of sin. Some people struggle with just being honest. Some people struggle with just being patient. Can be anything.

Paul asked in the seventh chapter of Romans who would end the war inside of him. He answered his own question. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Here's the deal. Jesus rode into town on a donkey. The donkey was an animal of peace. It symbolized peace. Jesus came to bring peace. But it was not a peace between the people and those soldiers riding into town on their horses. That was not the conflict he came to end. He came to set everyone free from that battle with sin that rages within. He came to eliminate that enemy.

His death on the cross was far from a defeat. It was the victory in the war against sin. We are set free. We can welcome him today with, "Hosanna!" We can invite him to save us now. We can invite him to save us now by asking him into our lives...where he will set us free from our enemy and give us peace.

Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"