

Luke 19:28-40

²⁸After Jesus had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹As he came near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ahead, ³⁰saying, “Go to the village ahead of you. When you enter it, you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹And if anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you will say this: ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³²Those who were sent ahead went and found things just as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴They said, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵Then they brought the colt to Jesus. They threw their robes on the colt and set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he went along, people spread their robes on the road. ³⁷As he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to praise God joyfully, with a loud voice, for all the miracles they had seen, ³⁸saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

³⁹Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

⁴⁰He replied, “I tell you, if these people would be silent, the stones would cry out.”

Save Us Now!

I.

I can imagine a beautiful spring day, that first Palm Sunday. There was a definite festive atmosphere to the day. So many people had flocked to the holy city of Jerusalem for one of the most important celebrations in their church year—Passover.

Passover was more than just a church year celebration for them, it was a tradition. I can hear Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*. (Play video).

Yes, tradition. Tradition had been incorporated into the Passover celebration. Some of it was part of what the people had originally done in the exodus from Egypt, other parts had just developed over time. Just as Tevye had to admit about many traditions, some of them seemed to defy explanation.

One tradition, at least, can certainly be understood. Many times in Israel’s history, even after the exodus from Egypt, the people had lived in captivity. It had been necessary to celebrate Passover in distant lands and distant cities. So a tradition had developed. At the end of Passover they said: “Next year in Jerusalem!” Around the world, even today, Jewish people close their celebration that same way.

Ah, tradition.

The crowds entering Jerusalem the first Palm Sunday were excited to be actually able to come to the Jerusalem for their celebration that year. Every piece of festive tradition they could latch on to made their excitement build, higher and higher. Patriotism was part of it—they were in the traditional capital of their homeland. This was the city where David had ruled his kingdom, and Solomon after him. This was the city with the temple, where the celebration could properly take place.

The Bible illustrates the fact that God often used historical figures to make his plan of salvation come to pass exactly the way he foretold it. Records from other kingdoms even serve to corroborate the history of the Bible, though believers don’t need outside facts to “prove” that what God says is true. We see it again in today’s lesson.

“[Jesus] sent two of his disciples ahead, ³⁰saying, “Go to the village ahead of you. When

you enter it, you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here.³⁴ And if anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you will say this: ‘The Lord needs it’” (Luke 19:29-31, EHV).

Jesus knew all the traditions and the symbolism. There was a certain pageantry and imagery that would be apparent when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. King David had used donkeys as his royal mount of choice.

“Then they brought the colt to Jesus. They threw their robes on the colt and set Jesus on it.³⁶ As he went along, people spread their robes on the road” (Luke 19:35-36, EHV). The people knew the tradition. Excitement and anticipation began to build as the crowds watch Jesus pass by. People started laying their robes in the path of the donkey as their exuberance neared a fevered pitch. Matthew adds: “Others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them out on the road” (Matthew 21:8, EHV). Who wouldn’t want to participate in the entrance of a king?

“As he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to praise God joyfully, with a loud voice, for all the miracles they had seen” (Luke 19:37, EHV). Excitement was building. Chattering voices were talking about his miracles. Those who hadn’t witnessed any firsthand heard about them from those who had been there. Jesus had picked up 5 loaves of bread and fed thousands. Just think of the way he could satisfy their hunger on a daily basis!

Hunger games were just the beginning. If he could be counted on to stave off hunger, he could also be relied upon to deliver worldly peace and prosperity unsurpassed by kings like David or Solomon in their days. What a fulfillment to all those Old Testament prophecies Jesus would make! The nation of Israel would rise to prominence once more and *they* would be there to be a part of it!

More traditions seemed perfectly appropriate to this situation. Perhaps some of the Passover hymns, like the one from Psalm 118. They chanted a part of it: “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Luke 19:38, EHV). Matthew continues with more of their joy-filled hymn: “Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9, EHV).

Ah, tradition! I wonder if the irony of their traditional chants reached from their mouths to their brains. To us, the name “Jesus” sounds quite different from “Hosanna,” but in their original language there is a much greater similarity. Long before this date, the angel had given instructions about naming Mary’s child. He said: “You are to give him the name Jesus” (Matthew 1:21, EHV). In Hebrew or Aramaic, his name is *Yeshua*, or Joshua. *Yeshua* means: “The Lord saves.” The cry of Hosanna comes from the same root word as Jesus’ name. *Hoshianna* literally means: “Save us now!”

II.

Tradition seems to be a way of life. The crowds were all about the traditions incorporated in their religious festivals. Like Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, many couldn’t really begin to explain the traditions—they just *were*. Do these things. Sing these hymns. Wear this kind of clothing, or this kind of hat to cover your head, or carry this kind of little prayer shawl. It’s tradition.

Having this nebulous thing called “faith” is all about tradition in our day, as well. Just about everyone claims to *have* “faith,” but what is “faith?” What does it mean to be “religious”? How does one define “spiritual”?

And there’s the problem. The prevailing attitude today is that each individual gets to define what his or her faith is. Each individual gets to decide personal beliefs and those beliefs will be expressed in worship or in the way the individual lives life. Taken to its

conclusion, that means that faith doesn't really need an object. Having faith becomes just having a positive "vibe," or "feeling."

Faith as a feeling or a vibe degenerates quickly into faith becoming only about following customs and rituals and...traditions.

We don't want the our Holy Week celebration to become only a series of traditions that we don't think about and don't really know about or understand. Palm Sunday worship isn't just about waving some palm branches around and checking out the potted plants. Later in the week, Maundy Thursday isn't just there for the "tradition" of receiving the Lord's Supper, but meditating deeply about what our Lord Jesus did for us and what he instituted. Good Friday isn't just about the tradition of sliding a nail into the hole in the cross, but using that nail we hold through the entire service to remind us of the pain of separation from the Heavenly Father our Lord Jesus endured so that we would *never* be separated from the Heavenly Father. And Easter Sunday is not just about the tradition of buying special new clothes and going out to Easter brunch with the family afterward; if you forget the joy of the resurrection, the traditions that you have built up around the day are completely meaningless and worthless.

So much tradition of today has the unhealthy potential to mirror the cheering Palm Sunday crowd. The people lining the streets waving palm branches and putting their robes and more branches in front of the donkey carrying the King seemed to have "faith," but later in the week it became obvious that what they had was merely "custom," "ritual," and "tradition."

Many got caught up in the hype of the crowd. The problem on that first Palm Sunday was, the crowd was crying out *at* the King, rather than *to* the King.

III.

Hosanna! Save us now! "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Luke 19:38, EHV). The irony of their traditional chant was that they were actually welcoming the One who really *was* bringing salvation at that very moment.

While the Palm Sunday crowd cried *at* the King, we join together this morning to cry our "Hosanna—save us now!" *to* the King.

Hosanna *to* the King means to recognize and confess that he is our only hope of salvation. Without him we are eternally lost. Save us now! That confession in true faith means to confess our sins and recognize the punishment those sins deserve. We know and understand that we must abandon all hope of saving ourselves or finding some assurance in heaven because of our own good behavior.

Hosanna! Save us now! Come to him with a broken and contrite heart, understanding that you and I are spiritually naked and poor, and look to him alone for clothing and true wealth and healing. To cry Hosanna *to* King Jesus in true faith means to come to him and plead: "Save me now! There is no other way!"

And that *is* what he came for. He didn't come to restore Israel to prominence among the nations. He didn't come to feed the masses by multiplying the loaves each day, but by feeding us with the Bread of Life—his Word by which we learn about all he did for our salvation.

Those who, by God's grace, cry *to* the King in true faith are heard by him. The Psalmist

David wrote: “With a loud voice I cry out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain” (Psalm 3:4, EHV). In David’s day the “holy mountain” was where the ark of the covenant was kept, on the future site of the temple. *Now* God’s holy mountain is Calvary. On a cross at the top of the mountain named Calvary hangs the answer to the problem of our sin—the only answer there is. How loudly and clearly God answers there when we cry *to* the King “Hosanna! Save us now!” There hangs Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Crowned with thorns then, he is now crowned with glory and honor. He rode into Jerusalem to go to that hill and die for you.

So cry *to* him. We cry with our pains, our hurts, our confusion, our problems, our fears, and even our doubts about his love for us. His answer comes back time and time again. I am your King. He is the proof of God’s forgiveness and love. He is the proof that the Lord *can* help you. He is the proof that God *will* help you. God will comfort you, encourage you, strengthen you, and equip you for every good work. “Blessed be the Lord, because he has heard the sound of my plea for mercy” (Psalm 28:6, EHV).

IV.

Hoshianna! Hosanna! Save us now! The hope for a new earthly kingdom and new traditions that the crowd had been all excited about was really quite weak in comparison to what Jesus actually came to establish. Their hopes were dashed when they learned of Jesus being taken into custody. Many turned on him immediately.

In the trial after Jesus’ arrest, Pilate asked about being him being a king. Jesus responded: “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight so that I would not be handed over to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from here” (John 18:36, EHV). When they heard about this, those in the crowds who had remained hopeful about a coming glorious kingdom led by Jesus had their hopes dashed.

Not us. We understand there is the new and better kingdom we gather in Holy Week to commemorate and to celebrate. We gather not merely for the sake of tradition, but to remember—to remember how our King established this new and better kingdom.

Hoshianna! Hosanna! Save us now! It is a fitting motto for Christ’s new and better kingdom. *This* kingdom is about one thing—salvation. Salvation means that we have eternal release from the bondage of sin; we have eternal life in the indescribable bliss and joy of heaven. This is the goal of our faith in Christ—the eternal salvation of our souls.

As members of that superior kingdom we also want others to know not to get caught up in traditions, but to live in glorious reality. Some *still* look for Jesus to establish a glorious Christian kingdom on this earth, thinking there will be a golden age of Christianity *here* in *this* world.

We share the glorious good news of the kingdom: “Salvation comes from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb” (Revelation 7:10, EHV).

Hosanna! Save us now! That is exactly what King Jesus—Yeshua—rides into Jerusalem to do. The cross assures us that this is exactly what he *did* do. It’s what the empty Easter tomb guarantees he will come back to do. That’s what the King is all about. That’s what the Kingdom is all about. Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb, and the Lamb freely shed his blood for all. God bless your Holy Week worship. Amen.