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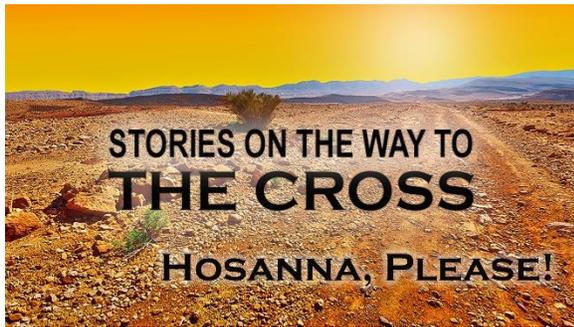
**Title:** Stories on the Way to the Cross: Hosanna, Please!

**Preaching:** Randy Spleth, Senior Minister

**Scripture:** [Psalm 22](#)

**Text:** [Matthew 21:1-11](#)

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We've arrived in Jerusalem and there is a crowd. When Jesus started this journey six weeks ago, nobody thought about social distancing. We certainly didn't think we'd be shouting Hosanna in front of our iPads, computers or televisions. We thought there would be the big crowd cheering on children waving Palm branches. We thought

we'd be shouting Hosanna back and forth. We didn't have a clue that life would be difficult, hard and frightening as we entered the holy city with Jesus.

But Jesus did. He knew it when he started his journey. It was an arguing point with his disciples. In Galilee, he told them that "The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected ...killed, and on the third day be raised." (Luke 9:22, 44). Not once but twice. Peter, in particular, didn't want to have anything to do with it. But Jesus had a destiny so "he set his face to go to Jerusalem." As they made their way down from Galilee, a journey of four or five days, he told stories and picked up a crowd. Maybe the growing crowd caused them to forget. Perhaps it was the stories. Whatever the reason, life did not seem so threatening, so difficult; it was easier, good. So just outside of Jericho, Jesus tells them again. He was going to be rejected, killed and rise on the third day. "The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about." (Luke 18:34).

It's human nature to deny bad news. Even the most pessimistic among us seldom think the worst will happen. Certainly, we've experienced this over the last few weeks. None of us believed in February that a virus in Hunan China would be here on Palm Sunday. It's their problem, a problem on the other side of the world.

When Jesus nears the city, he sends two disciples to find a mount, a nursing donkey with her little colt trotting along beside her. Jesus was drawing on the prophecy of the Old Testament. Zechariah predicted the ride of a king

“on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Then, as Jesus descends from the Mount of Olives, palm branches are spread on the road before him, they shout. “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (Matthew 11:9).

Now there is a word for a day like ours. Hosanna is an old Hebrew phrase that means “Please save us!” The crowds of people lining the streets of Jerusalem needed saving. They were people longing for a future. They lived at a time of great oppression, fear, and isolation. Roman dominance made life miserable. But the power of Jesus teaching and his miracles excited them. They were hopeful, optimistic. They could see the end of the terrible suffering. Jesus was going to liberate them from the present crisis by setting up an earthly kingdom. Hosanna. Please Save Us Son of David. Hosanna. For heaven’s sake, save us!

But of course, Jesus knows that his mission is not to overthrow Rome and turn away the oppressor. His kingdom wasn’t of might and sword but compassion and love. Salvation wasn’t about making life easier but rather, giving hope in a future. It wasn’t about avoiding the storms of life but finding strength for surviving storms that are inevitable. Hosanna! Please save us! The shouts were a demand for the immediate, a belief that every problem is fixable with the right person, the right resources, at the right time.

Unfortunately, when the immediate solution wasn’t at hand, things turned ugly fast. The suffering of a people would become the suffering of Jesus. Those who believed he was the solution, decided that he was the problem. Those who had shouted to Jesus, “please save us” would later in the week, shout “Crucify him.” Even his own disciples betrayed him, denied him, fled from him. Unlike us, Jesus wasn’t caught off guard. He predicted from the moment he set his face up on Jerusalem, predicted his suffering. He knew that the pandemic he’d face was not adoration but hatred, not worship but rejection. Given what he knew, what he prophesied, what he predicted, how could he, how did he face it?

With tears. Luke reports that as he sees Jerusalem, Jesus weeps. If John’s timing is accurate, it is the second time that Jesus has wept in a week. Six days earlier he had wept over this friend Lazarus’ grave. Jesus, with the shouts of Hosanna, please save in his ears, cries. He weeps saying, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:42).

Might he weep over us today? Absolutely. Suffering is unavoidable whether it be his ride of destiny or our journey through a global pandemic. We weep

and cry out to God. We have company. The Bible is filled with tears. Looking for devotional material in such a frightening time? You'll find solace and support among the Bible's hymnbook. "Be gracious to me, Lord," prays the sixth Psalm, "for I am struggling; my bones are shaking with terror." (Psalm 6:2). "Why do you stand far off, O Lord?" cries the tenth Psalm. "Why do you hide yourself in time of trouble?" (Psalm 10:1) And, all the more terrifying because Jesus will later this week quote a lament while hanging on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1).

But that very lament points to the purpose of tears. Those at the foot of the cross record only one verse, but Jesus was embracing the entire Psalm. His cries of anguish were followed by the absolute trust in God's goodness and promises. "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. "He trusts in the LORD ... Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you..." And then, "But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me."

This is the truth for today, for Palm Sunday and for a global pandemic. Suffering often comes from the sheer inability to understand what is happening or why. And the only consolation of this dilemma is the truth that God weeps with us. Some Christians like to think of God as above all that, knowing everything, in charge of everything, calm and unaffected by the troubles in his world. That's not the picture we get in the Bible.

"God was grieved to his heart," Genesis declares, "over the violent wickedness of his human creatures. God was devastated when his own bride, the people of Israel, turned away from him. And when God came back to his people in the person of Jesus, he weeps at the tomb of his friend and over Jerusalem and their rejection of a cure. And God continues to weep. Paul says the Holy Spirit "groaning" within us at the paining of our presenting suffering found in the whole creation."<sup>1</sup>

It's the truth for this Palm Sunday and truth for a global pandemic. We need to shout Hosanna, please save us. Hosanna, for heaven's sake, please! For our salvation comes not in a vaccine or cure, but in the Lord. And if we dare but weep with Jesus, we can also affirm with him this truth. "LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me."

It is the hope, the promise, and the power of this day and power and strength for the days ahead. Hosanna, yes, hosanna Lord Jesus. Be our strength and come quickly to help us.

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, N. T. An opportunity for lament. <https://www.christianpost.com/news/covid-19-pandemic-an-opportunity-for-christians-to-lament-not-have-all-answers-nt-wright-says.html>

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