



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for Palm Sunday
April 8 & 9, 2017

Hosanna in the Highest

John 12:12-19

¹² On the next day the great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, ¹³ took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him, and began to cry out, "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel." ¹⁴ And Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, ¹⁵ "FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SEATED ON A DONKEY'S COLT." ¹⁶ These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him. ¹⁷ And so the multitude who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb, and raised him from the dead, were bearing Him witness. ¹⁸ For this cause also the multitude went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign. ¹⁹ The Pharisees therefore said to one another, "You see that you are not doing any good; look, the world has gone after Him."

Beloved, the time has come. The time has come to welcome our Lord, to behold Him as He comes to us. Of course, we behold Him every time we hear His Word and the Sacraments are administered, but we're even more focused on His coming today, as we commemorate His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The crowds that went before Him and those that followed directed the attention of the whole city to the Savior of all mankind. They beheld Him as He came riding on a donkey, in accordance with the prophecy found in the book of Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9). They beheld their King then as He rode into the Holy City. We behold our King today coming to us in His holy Word. On this Palm Sunday, the Sunday of the Passion, this first day of the holiest week in the church year, we behold Him as He comes, and we reflect on why He came – to Jerusalem and to us.

This reflective contemplation of the cause and purpose of our Savior's coming is the reason we don't sing overly cheerful songs during Holy Week. Instead, we sing hymns that take on a more somber tone, hymns that direct our attention to the Lord's Passion – His suffering, crucifixion, and death. The crowds in our text shouted "Hosanna!" as Jesus entered Jerusalem. And they sang the Benedictus, which is Latin for "Blessed is He." "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!" (v. 13). They saw the coming of the kingdom in this King they hailed, and they prepared the way for Him, spreading their cloaks and palm branches in His way. The shout of



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"Hosanna" was appropriate for them on that first Palm Sunday and it's appropriate for us on *this* Palm Sunday.

The Hebrew word "hosanna" means "save now." It's a cry for salvation. In today's Gospel it meant something like: "God save the King!" or "Hail to the Chief!" In essence, it's a proclamation of praise. When we sing our Hosannas, we convey both meanings. We praise the Lord for coming to us today in His Word and Sacrament, and we pray that He would save us through the proclamation of the Gospel, as He's promised, "For . . . the gospel . . . is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes . . ." (Rom. 1:16). Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday for the sake of the crowd. He enters this house of worship today for our sake. He makes these entrances in order to forgive sins – their sins and ours.

You see, Jesus entered the holy city for the same reason He enters this holy house. He came to save sinners. The Palm Sunday crowds were all sinners. The same is true with us. You and I are just as sinful as those people two millennia ago. The people who praised the Lord, shouting "hosanna to the King of kings" are the same people who on Good Friday shouted "Crucify Him!" and mocked Him during His crucifixion. They welcomed Him into Jerusalem with cheers and a few days later ridiculed Him and cast Him out of the city.

And we're no better. Today we sang, "All glory, laud, and honor To You, Redeemer, King, To whom the lips of children Made sweet hosannas ring" (LSB 442:1). We sing His praises, but often our attitude is more like the Good Friday crowd. Our hosannas are half-hearted. Our songs of "Blessed is He" are empty. We're more concerned about egg hunts and chocolate bunnies than we are about the One who gave us the holiest of days to celebrate. We're more anxious for Spring Break than we are the Christ who came that first Palm Sunday and who'll come again on the Last Day. We're by nature sinful and unclean, spiritually blind, dead, and enemies of God. We poor, miserable sinners have indeed offended the King who comes to us and justly deserve His present and eternal punishment.

Jesus wept because of the hard-heartedness of the people at Jerusalem, but He weeps for us, too. Luke tells us that, "When [Jesus] drew near and saw the city, He wept over it, saying, 'Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation'" (Lk. 19:41-44). In our sinfulness, too, beloved, we fail to recognize the Lord's visitation among us. When was the last time you saw Him next to you in the heart and soul of that dear brother or sister seated by you in the



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pew? When was the last time you heard His voice sounding through the mouth of your pastors from this pulpit? When was the last time you saw the blood dripping from His side into the chalice on this altar? When was the last time you felt Him move upon you through your worship of Him in this place? He's here, beloved. As surely as He stood on that hillside and wept over Jerusalem, he's here today. How often does He weep over you?

This is the reason for this time of repentance – why we need to be a *people* of repentance, confessing our sins and iniquities to our gracious Lord and King. We pray the Psalms, especially the penitential ones: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143. We pray the Catechism, begging God's forgiveness for doing what we're forbidden to do, asking the Holy Spirit to create in us clean hearts, so that we may gladly do what He commands. We pray in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We pray "hosanna": Save us now, O Lord.

And here's the good news: He will. And He does. Even during this Holy Week, when our focus is on the suffering of Jesus for our sins, there's reason for joy, reason for hope. Jesus has come, riding on in majesty, in lowly pomp riding on to die. He's come to us as one of us, having been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Riding on, riding on in majesty, His last and fiercest strife was nigh; the Father on His sapphire throne awaits His own anointed Son, waiting for Him to take up His own throne, on a cross atop a hill outside Jerusalem. The crowds laid robes, tunics, and palm branches before Him then. The Lord bids us lay our sins before Him now, for He Himself has borne the burden of our sins, and was crushed by them. He came into this world to die for our sins. He came to the cross to give His body and shed His blood to cover our sins before the Father. He would soon return to life by His glorious resurrection, according to the Scriptures. He has risen from the dead to show Himself Victor over sin, death, and the power of the devil, so that this axis of evil would have no power over us.

Today, and throughout Holy Week, we behold Him in His humility, for we shall soon behold Him in all His glory. We've beheld Him at the font, where He cleansed our hearts and washed the stain of sin from us. We've beheld Him in His Word, read and proclaimed to us for the strengthening of our faith. We've beheld Him at His table where He gives His very body and blood sacrificed for us on the cross to life everlasting. And so we sing "hosanna!" on this Palm Sunday, the song we sing every Sunday, as our Lord comes to us in His blessed Means of Grace. "Hosanna in the highest!" That ancient song we sing, For Christ is our Redeemer, The Lord of heav'n, our King. Oh, may we ever praise Him, With heart and life and voice, And in His blissful presence Eternally rejoice" (LSB 443:3).

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen