

Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest
Matthew 21:1-9

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Some of you may be wondering, "Why the account of Palm Sunday is today's text on this first Sunday in Advent?" And a good question it is. During Advent we are looking forward to the One who is coming, as Advent means coming. Who is the One coming? Christ! It is for this reason that we look at Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem on the first Sunday in Advent.

Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest - was the cry as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, lowly and mounted on a donkey. Save now, save now in the highest - was the meaning. Hosanna, save now, is what we cry out during the advent season. It is what we look forward to with hope and expectation. We want God to come and "Save Now."

But, what were those inhabitants of Jerusalem meaning by the phrase? What did they want from this man who had done so many miracles?

They too wanted to be "saved now," but mainly, they wanted to be *saved now* from tyranny of the Roman rule under which they were burdened. Listen again to how they treated Jesus. **{Read vs 8 - 9}** *Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"*

Did you hear what the people did? They spread their cloaks on the road. Would you lay your coat on the road for a donkey to walk over? This is a road that was nothing more than hard packed dirt, if it was even that. It might have been wet and therefore very muddy. And those who didn't lay a cloak on the road cut a branch from a tree to lay in the road for Him, probably from a date palm.

Why did the people do this? What was the big deal? *Hosanna to the Son of David.* Here was the heir of David, the once mighty king who made the kingdom of Israel into a great nation. They expected much the same from Jesus. They wanted to be saved from the rule of the Romans. They wanted an earthly kingdom, just like under David. These people in Jerusalem wanted a king riding in pomp and splendor.

We may look back at them and think that they were pretty foolish. But, just how would we have reacted? Would we have been any different? We may think that we would have. After all, we know that all those Old Testament prophecies pointed to Christ. They had the Old Testament too; they should have had it all figured out.

Oh, but they did see the prophecies, unfortunately, only through sinful human eyes. They called him "Son of David," a Messianic title. They saw in Christ the Savior long promised. That, however, is where things went awry. They saw the Messiah in terms of their felt human needs, and not in the way God had intended.

They wanted a king, a savior who would bring them out of their political oppression. They wanted to

be saved from Roman rule and to be their own country again.

You know, even looking back at poor Jerusalem you can see a picture of yourselves. You also want God on your terms, just as the inhabitants of Jerusalem wanted the Messiah on their terms. You want God to be there for you when you want Him to be there. You want him to give you and do for you the things that you want Him to do. You push aside His whole plan, the greater scheme of things. You feel that as Christians you should have certain things taken care of. And there are some Christians who will tell you just that.

I had to talk with a young lady about just such a problem. It seems that one of her friends belonged to a church that believes that enough faith can do anything. This young lady was informed that her sickness would be healed if only she had enough faith. After a couple of days and no results, her friend came back to her and told her that she must not be a true believer because she was still sick. She was told that her faith wasn't strong enough - she had to get it right with God. Or so her friend told her.

My mother was a woman of more faith than I'll ever have. She lived most of my life in her bed with Multiple Sclerosis, an incurable disease. She always reminded me that Christ never said our problems would disappear. Quite the contrary, He said take up your cross and follow Me. A cross is not an easy thing to bear.

For another example, look at Paul; he tells the Corinthians that he's able to use all the gifts of the Spirit that he lists - yet, as far as we know, he went through his entire life with a thorn in the flesh, something he begged God to remove from him on numerous occasions - whatever sickness that was. If he could heal others, why not himself? Because God wanted Paul to rely upon God - upon God's strength. It is in the Christian's weakness that God's strength is most evident.

God gives you healing all right, but a healing that far surpasses the physical well-being you'd like. You are healed of all sin and eternal death in Christ. God's plan is bigger than yours. Unfortunately as well, forgiveness of sins isn't something you can see, but it is most definitely real.

In other ways you also want Christ on your terms. You may shop around for churches until you find one that suits your desires rather than one that gives you what you need - Christ and Him crucified. Everybody should belong to the church which teaches the truth of God's Word. Do not belong to a church, or a church body, because that is the church to which parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents belong. Attend the church at which Christ is central, and not man; where the concern is on God and His Word, not on the desires and whims of the people.

That's what you see coming in Advent and why the text for the first Sunday in Advent looks at the triumphal entry into Jerusalem before we get to Christmas, as we approach Christ's birth - to get into focus why He had to be born. Christ didn't fulfill the dreams of the people of Jerusalem when He entered their city - He didn't deliver them from the hands of Caesar as they wanted. But, a week later, Christ did "Save now."

Jesus, as the Messiah, was the Savior of mankind as only God Himself could 'Save Now.' He came to the people of Jerusalem as what they needed, salvation from their sins and from eternal confinement to the realms of Satan. In humility He came into Jerusalem to bear their sins and yours to the cross of

Golgotha.

In the fullness of time, Christ united Himself to you in human form. He took upon Himself human flesh and is knowledgeable of all that you go through in this life. Why? because He has suffered as you have - in the flesh. Christ came to us and lived as we lived. He came to the people of Jerusalem and they were found lacking, unprepared. Are you ready for His coming to you? Are you ready today?

I pray you can all say "yes". It is as that Word of God is continually a part of your lives, that you are made ready to receive Christ. Your faith is a gift from God as His Holy Spirit works through His Holy Word, and it is this faith that receives God's grace. As the Word works in your lives, the faith you were given in baptism is strengthened.

It is easy to lament the state of our society and the problems that face our youth. But it is only God's Word that can strengthen them to face those trials in life.

Christ gathered us in this place that He might come to us, for He is the very Word which speaks to us. The Word made flesh speaks to you and forgives your sins and builds you up in the faith.

Without God's Word continually in your lives, it is very easy to stray from it. As adults, you must continue to be in that Word. In the Word is where Christ comes to you. Today, you are immersed in that Word. It is the liturgy you sing. It is the Word of Absolution and the Gospel preached that you hear read. It is the Sacrament you receive.

As you study the Scriptures, God's Word, you read and learn what Hosanna means. Christ entered Jerusalem almost 2000 years ago for a purpose. His purpose was to take upon Himself the sins of all mankind, to "Save Now." Hosanna in the highest, God the highest came to save now.

It was a perfect plan. It was, of course, perfect because it was God's plan. His Son came to earth born of human flesh, He lived a life without sin, yet allowed Himself to be put to death - death being God's punishment for sin. He also rose three days later victorious over sin and death to free you from them, that you might join Him - Saved Now.

God's wrathful demands of punishment for sin were laid upon His only Son. In the death of Christ on the cross, you see all of God's wrath against sin. God requires payment in blood for the sins of all mankind. In the death of Christ on the cross, you also see all of God's love for you. He was willing to give up His only Son as payment for **YOUR** sinfulness - God gave up His Son for your sinful disregard for His Word.

In spite of what those massed crowds in Jerusalem expected, they chanted the appropriate cry, "Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest." God did save now, in the best way, in the way that He had planned from the very beginning. The multitudes in Jerusalem received in Christ what they needed most - a Savior from their sins.

Today Christ continues to come to you. As you prepare in Advent for His coming - and He does come. He comes to you in the Gospel, giving you salvation. He comes to you in and through His Word, for it is there that He builds your faith. Faith that saves you. It is, after all, God's gift to you.

He also comes in the flesh to "Save Now." He rode into Jerusalem, lowly and mounted on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey, to save. Today, He comes to you lowly and hidden under the forms of bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Before you receive His precious Body and Blood, you will praise Him as the One who comes to save you even now as you sing; "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest".

Yes, in our liturgy, which you very often rarely give a second thought, God's blessings are given to you. Yes, in the liturgy that very often doesn't get a second thought, the richness of God's blessings to you are delivered. God, your most high and loving Lord comes to you and has saved you now.

You see, things haven't changed all that much in 2000 years. God still comes and saves now in the best way possible, through His Word and Sacrament, as only He in His merciful wisdom knows how.

Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest. Amen