

Hosanna!

By Scott Runyon

First Baptist Church Birmingham

April 5, 2020

Mark 11:1-10, Psalm 118

Prayer

God meet us in the space where we are right now. ... Clear our mind from all distractions. ... Help our hearts to be open to each other and to your Spirit. ... Teach us your ways. Lead us on the path of righteousness for the sake of those in need. And may we experience the wonder and mystery of this Palm Sunday together. Amen!

Read Mark 11:1-10 (NRSV)

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed

them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

OK, wave your branches and lay down your coats!

Sometimes on Palm Sunday we read this verse about people shouting "Hosanna" and only think of it being about praise. Like people were shouting "Praise God!" much like when shouting "hallelujah."

However, the word "hosanna" is very different from "hallelujah." Hosanna doesn't mean "Praise God!" Instead, it means "save us" or "help us" or "rescue us." From even more ancient times than Jesus' the word hosanna included a plea for help as part of a prayer offered straight to the heart of God.

We see this in Psalm 118. Notice also similarities to the story of

Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. In verses 25-27 it says:

*Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us
success!
Blessed is the one who comes in
the name of the Lord.
We bless you from the house of the
Lord.
The Lord is God,
and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with
branches, up to the horns of the
altar.*

It is very interesting that as Jesus is entering Jerusalem with such celebration, the people are invoking Psalm 118.

This psalm is part of a group of psalms called the Hallel Psalms that celebrate how God does wonderful things on behalf of the poor and needy.

This psalm begins in verse 1 with who God is:

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!

and continues in verse 5&6:

Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place. With the

Lord on my side I do not fear. What can mortals do to me?

By invoking Psalm 118 the people are saying several things. First, they are identifying with those who are needy and oppressed while placing their trust in God to save them from the difficult oppression they live with daily.

Secondly, remember that they are celebrating with focus on the person of Jesus. This demonstrates that they have placed their hope in Jesus as the embodiment of God's justice and mercy for them.

They are declaring their believe in God's upside-down world where humility is more important than power. Where service to others is more important than keeping for one's self. Where the least of these is lifted up and the prideful is thrown down.

It is not coincidental that Jesus is riding in humility on a donkey into the city of Jerusalem not from the main entrance on the west side of town where typically kings and rulers would enter to great pomp and circumstance. No, Jesus enters from the common-person's entrance to the east from the Mount of Olives.

It is very clear that Jesus is doing something extraordinary, something unique, and something unexpected. And the people who are there get it! They get that Jesus stands in stark contrast to the current ruling powers and organizational structures, and stands decidedly with those most in need.

Acknowledging all of this and invoking the ancient story from Psalm 118, the people spread their cloaks on the ground and grab leafy branches from the fields and lay them along his path. They do this because this is what people had done long ago to acknowledge and honor the reign of a new king.

Today I declare to you that Jesus is here now reigning in our lives, in your living rooms, kitchens and basements, on our streets, in our grocery stores, department stores and restaurants. And especially, Jesus reigns in our emergency rooms and hospitals where there are many who are needy this morning.

So, take off your coats and lay them down! Wave your leafy branches and lay them down!

Hosanna! God, save us we pray!
Hosanna! God, rescue us we pray!
Hosanna! God, help us we pray!

Let us honor our God's presence among us and our affirm our dependence on God who stands for and with those most in need. This is the good news for all ages that is found throughout the Bible.

It is appropriate to finish in the same celebratory way that Psalm 118 opens and closes:

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

Let us pray for those most in need in our world.

Prayers Of The Community

We pray this morning for those most in need in our community, our world-wide community. In this past month our world feels much smaller to us. We are suffering along with those in China, and those in Italy as well as those in Detroit and down the road from us who have family members struggling with the coronavirus. They are part of us and we a part of them. We weep for them and pray that you would be near to them now.

We also celebrate with those who are reunited with family members who have recovered from illness.

We are truly one people on this planet. So, we pray for our

community, our family that is made up of people from every continent, every language, and every tribe.

Remind us how connected we are when we get stuck in the things that seem to divide us, those things about which we disagree. Draw us back to what binds us together even more strongly.

So, we pray for those of us who struggle, those of us who harbor fear, those of us who linger in and are immobilized by uncertainty. Be near to us and walk this path with us. Hosanna, help us, give us comfort knowing that we are never alone.

In your precious and holy name we pray, Amen!

Offering

We can't pass the plates to collect our offering this morning. But what I want to do is thank all of you who have continued to give to the church during the past month. And thank you to those of you who have even increased your giving, perhaps even sacrificially so that the church will have what we need during this critical time.

At the same time that you are giving, our church leadership is working hard to reduce our expenses, re-negotiate our

contracts and spend wisely during this season.

If you want to follow through with your commitment to support the church financially, you can give through the "Donate" link at: "FirstBaptistBirmingham.org."

You can also mail a check to the church or call your bank to set up a "bill pay" arrangement.

My main message today is one of gratitude for your generosity. Thank you!

April Communion Offering To Benefit Friendship House

As a congregation we have given support to Friendship House, a critical mission outpost in Hamtramck. We have donated food & clothing to them, served meals at their location, had people serve on their Board of Directors, and even had a member of our congregation serve as their Executive Director for more than two decades. Their ministry serves a diverse community of residents, mostly immigrants, to help with basic human needs. Friendship House has an extreme and immediate need during the COVID 19 pandemic. Forty-nine per cent of Hamtramck lives under the national poverty line and depend on food and clothing from this ministry.

The building is closed now since they are honoring the government guidelines to stay at home, and their distribution hours have been reduced to one hour, three days a week. They are trying to keep their Office Manager paid while she is working from home and has young children to support. Friendship House is in the same dilemma as many charities and businesses affected by COVID 19, struggling to stay in business while meeting an overwhelming demand for services.

Cathy is asking for prayers for the community, their volunteers, and those coming to Friendship House for their only source of food during this devastating time. She is encouraged by the compassionate connections forming in the neighborhood. Your donation can help keep services flowing at Friendship House, even with its doors closed. They demonstrate our Church Covenant's commitment to meet each others' needs and show compassion.

The Covenant of the First Baptist Church Birmingham

Recognizing that God first loved us and gave us the gifts of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible, we covenant with God and with one another:

As God has been faithful to us in the past, we trust God to help us become a people of vision for today and tomorrow.

- to uphold our Baptist liberties
- to engage in the dedication of children, believer's baptism, and the Lord's Supper
- to recognize our need for each other
- to provide a nurturing environment through mutual love, care and respect
- to welcome all persons to our church
- to encourage spiritual growth through family and personal devotion, Bible study and prayer
- to participate in worship, fellowship, stewardship and service
- to share the gifts God has given us as a church and as individuals
- to cooperate with American Baptists and to work for Christian unity and interfaith understanding
- to be just in our dealings, demonstrate compassion, and respect God's creation
- to teach and learn as a community, and
- to share the Gospel as we practice Christian discipleship in a life-long journey.

As God has been faithful to us in the past, we trust God to help us become a people of vision for today and tomorrow.

Revised & adopted by the congregation in 1998

Communion

I invite you each to experience communion over distance for the first time. This demonstrates for us how compassionate and how loving our God is. It can remind us how in ages past the Israelites' temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and they could no longer go to a central place to encounter God together. Instead, prophets reminded them that God was not limited to the temple and had not forgotten them, but would meet them exactly where they were. God expanded their vision of worship and expanded their vision of community.

Today, we acknowledge God's presence right where we are.

Let us pray: God we know that your creation is already blessed and this food and drink that we have here is already blessed. We pray that by receiving these blessings together even in different places, that you might bless us and bind us together as one as a people who are forgiven and empowered to live life fully as you intended. Amen.

I invite you to take your blessed bread, cracker or other food. Take

a look at it. Notice the texture. Notice the smell. Notice the weight of it in your hand. Notice how you might be even now salivating just thinking about this food. The food that our body longs for represents how we long for our God's presence to be with us. We long to commune with our God, to be close and experience God's love directly, intimately. I invite you to take that food and consume it knowing God is there.

I don't have juice, but I have water. This water represents living water that flows from the abundance of God's presence directly into our lives, to nourish us, and provide all that we need to be healthy and well, no matter what our circumstances. Let us drink together.

Let us sing "Bind Us Together"
A Capella

Closing Blessing

Now may the glory, the beauty, the majesty, the wonder, the love, and compassion of God be made known in this world through your acts of love. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen!

Announcements (April 5, 2020)

New Book Discussion Groups

We are starting new book discussion groups. Leona Frost has just published a new book on the first 150-year history of our church. She and Dave started delivering those books to homes of people this past week. If you would like to facilitate a group, simply let me know along with what day and time you can meet. I'll set up a Zoom link for you and we'll announce it by email on Wednesday.

Zoom For Families

Since the church now has a Zoom account, families who want to connect over distance can have video chats! This can work for Easter, for birthdays, or for no reason other than to connect. I'm convinced that seeing each other is 350% better than only hearing one another! Let me or Bill know when you'd like to have your Zoom session and we will email you the link.

Children's Time Online

Tuesday morning at 11 am, Pastor Scott will lead the kids in a children's activity and lesson through Zoom. <https://zoom.us/j/815152623>

Men's Breakfast

Connect with a group of men through Zoom each Wednesday morning for breakfast at 8 am. <https://zoom.us/j/2486440550>.

150th Anniversary Party

The church's 150th Anniversary party originally scheduled for the end of April will be moved to a later date. We'll let you know when the new date is set.