

“THE LONGING CRY OF HOSANNA”
Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent, December 3, 2023
St. John Lutheran Church, Massillon, Ohio

Mark 11:1-10: *Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. 3 If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.’” 4 And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it. 5 And some of those standing there said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” 6 And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. 7 And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. 8 And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. 9 And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”*

Today, on the First Sunday in Advent, the beginning of a whole new church year, one week after three Sundays contemplating the end of time and Jesus’ Second Coming in Judgment and Righteousness, three weeks before we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, we hear the sad and desperate cry, “*Hosanna!*”

“*Hosanna*” is a Hebrew word which means, “*Save us, we pray!*” We think of the crowd’s welcoming of Jesus during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as a cry of exhilaration and joy. There may have been elation in Jesus’ appearance, but the multitude’s cry of “*hosanna*” suggests that there was a longing for salvation from the Man riding on that donkey that day.

Hosanna! Save us! In Israel today there are many citizens and hostages and their families literally crying out, “*Hosanna! Save us!*”

Our country and the world are living in increasingly dangerous times. So much unrest and anxiety about violence and crime entering their communities. Hosanna! Save us!

After three Sundays considering Judgment Day and the Second Coming of Christ and preparing for the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem, it may seem odd that the Gospel Lesson is Jesus’ Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem.

Where is John the Baptist? And Gabriel visiting the young maiden Mary? Oh, we will hear from them in the next few Sundays.

But you are probably asking how this Gospel on the first Sunday in Advent is preparing us for Christmas. The answer is the “*longing cry of hosanna*” – Save us! Advent prepares us for the One who will save us.

Or as today’s Old Testament lesson shouts out, “*Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence — as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil — to make Your name known to Your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at Your presence!*”

In a real sense, Jesus’ Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem fits in very well with the First Sunday in Advent as we begin our preparations for celebrating the birth of the One who will answer the cry of hosanna with His mighty saving actions on behalf of a sin-sick world.

Everything – and I mean everything! – that has happened in this world which would lead to its ultimate destruction has been pointing to this event in our Gospel, going all the way back to Adam and Eve in the paradise that turned into a deadly pit!

And what was God’s response? His response was to promise a Savior who would rescue mankind by crushing Satan’s head and eliminating all the destructive work he had done.

After the fall into sin, Adam named his wife Eve, which means “*living*” or “*life*” – an ironic or strange choice after he and Eve had just brought sin and death into the world. Yet the name Eve or “*Life*” is a good one because they trusted in God’s promise to bring life back from death through the “*seed*” Who will one day crush the serpent’s head.

Now listen to this! From that time on, God shaped world history for His saving purposes. Everything that happened was due to God’s plan to keep His promises, even if appearances did not look good, and with His people’s “*longing cries of Hosanna.*”

God saved His promises in the flood, He called Abraham to be the father of the nation from which this Savior would come. He was with his people during their slavery in Egypt and rescued them. He was patient when they demanded a king instead of the theocracy He had created for them. He did not abandon them in their exile in Babylon, even though they were there because of their unfaithfulness to Him.

Along this path of history, God gave glimpses of what was to come. Through the words of His prophets, God gave details of the Messiah's life and work. He would be from Abraham's family; and then more specifically from Judah's family; and then even more specifically from King David's family.

He would have a kingdom that would never end. He would be a servant who would suffer for the sins of all people. He would be born in Bethlehem. He would even ride on a donkey's colt, as the prophet Zechariah promised, a humble yet kingly entrance.

And so Palm Sunday is really the start of the final fulfillment of all of these promises. Advent, or "*Coming*," is close to the "*Coming Fulfilled*," Jesus coming to be the true King and Savior of the world, coming for the final answer to the "*longing cry of hosanna in the highest*" through His saving life and ministry.

When Jesus sent His disciples to the town ahead to secure that donkey's colt "*on which no one has ever sat*," we see Jesus' humility and servanthood, but more importantly, Jesus is fully carrying out God's promises made about Him.

The Messiah would be a King bringing salvation as He rides on a young and lowly donkey, getting ready to empty Himself on the tortuous tree of the cross and die for all the sins of the world and conquer the death that all sinners deserve in order to answer the *longing cry of Hosanna!*

Jesus is the true Messiah, the long-awaited cure for the sin that dooms this world. He is a true champion over Satan who will be crushed and banished while death is overcome and eternal life bestowed on all believers.

This is the promise expressed in the Garden of Eden and the direction that history is heading into by the plan and power of our gracious God, through His long-awaited Son.

But why? Why would almighty God go through this saving plan in the midst of rebellious and disobedient human beings through all these thousands of years? Why would He send His beloved Son to carry out this plan to salvage the wreckage of this God-forsaken world caused by us?

Well, it is because of you and me, and more to the point, because of His love for us. The sin that we inherited from our parents, our own sin flowing out of our corrupt minds, and the countless sinful actions we commit deserving nothing but hell, eternal separation from God for all of our sins. And there is nothing we can do to save ourselves or any other person on the face of this earth.

And this takes us back to that one word, that shout, that cry, that we hear from the crowd on Palm Sunday, "*Hosanna!*" They are quoting Psalm 118, which is a clear Messianic prophecy.

That crowd was ready for Advent, acknowledging the coming of the true Messiah. Waving palm branches and spreading their cloaks and palms on the road.

But more importantly, their cry of "*Hosanna!*" overpowers the pomp and circumstance of the moment as they express the most humble and important words that could ever be sent upward towards a loving God – "*Hosanna!*" – "*Save us!*" Then a second time, "*Hosanna in the highest!*" – "*Please save us!*"

That is powerful! Whether or not that crowd on Palm Sunday fully understood and appreciated everything the Messiah was going to do is irrelevant. As we ponder this Gospel text, we also join our voices in shouts of "*Hosanna!*"

And what are we saying? We are saying that there is no way we can correct our lives and buy a ticket to heaven. We are admitting that we have no hope of escaping from the prison of death by ourselves unless someone actually reaches down and pulls us out.

Hosanna is a longing cry for help, and also an acclamation of praise. Hosanna! Please save us!

And this cry is properly directed to Jesus.

Jesus' name in Hebrew is pronounced, "*Yeshua*," meaning "*he saves*." The word Hosanna comes from the same root word in Hebrew and is pronounced "*Yoshanna*." "*Yeshua*." – "*Yoshanna*." He saves – save us!

So the people in the streets on Palm Sunday cry, "*Save us*," or "*Jesus us!*," directing their hopes to this Jesus, the promised Messiah, Yahweh in the flesh! Their only hope!

Whether the crowd was hoping that Jesus would free the nation from the Romans or some other worldly goal, God used their cries and words of praise from the Old Testament to point to what He was actually going to do.

The angel Gabriel was clear in his promises to both Mary and Joseph that the child to be born of Mary would be the Son of the Most High God, the Savior of the world.

The prophet Zechariah was clear in stating, *“Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and brings salvation”* (Zechariah 9:9).

All four Gospels in the New Testament tell us that Jesus’ disciples did not fully understand nor appreciate the work of Jesus during His earthly ministry, but after Jesus’ death and resurrection they did.

You and I, on this First Sunday in Advent of this new Church Year, have the benefit of hindsight that the disciples and the crowd in Jerusalem did not have. We know the rest of the story. We know what is going to happen. We know what the results of Jesus’ work are going to be.

Jesus lived a perfect life of obedience to God, just as was promised. And now He was going to His agonizing suffering and death, as foretold in Scripture, on that cross of Calvary.

But all of that pain and torment, the punishment for sins He did not deserve, would result in saving you and me from all of our sins.

All of it means that we are rescued from the eternal terrors of hell and will be brought into eternal life.

Today, on this First Sunday of Advent and the new Church Year, we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus our Savior in a few weeks, and then will journey with Him eventually to the cross of salvation and the empty tomb of victory and glorify the humble King whom we see today riding on a donkey’s colt!

In the sermon hymn we sang:

*“O Lord, how shall I meet You,
How welcome You aright?
Your people long to greet You,
My hope, my heart's delight!”*

We could do no better than the crowd who greeted Jesus as He entered Jerusalem, *“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”*

In the Name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

– Pastor John L. Telloni