

April 5, 2020 • Palm Sunday • Holy Communion • Online Worship

“Still We Shout Hosanna”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

Psalm 118:1,19-29

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

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

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.

You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you.

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



If we've ever taken Palm Sunday for granted in the past, this is definitely NOT the year to do it again. This is a Palm Sunday unlike most of us have ever experienced. We should all be *here*, smiling, singing, waving our palms, delighting in the joy of the children's procession. Instead, we're keeping safe in our homes, drawing on memories of this joyous day to fill our hearts and revive our souls.

This is a very different and unexpected Palm Sunday. But just maybe it can help open our eyes anew to the true power of that very first Palm Sunday. That, too, was a totally unexpected day. My guess is that just a week, maybe even a couple days prior, no one could have imagined that it could happen.

Remember—it came in a time of intense political ferment in Jerusalem when the people were literally dying for change. Following 300 years of freedom from slavery in Egypt, they were suffering from 100 years of Roman domination, begun by the Roman general Pompeii. Uprisings had started. The Zealots were mobilizing. Zaduk the Pharisee had led a revolution in and around Jerusalem and his followers had been put to death. The Romans executed all two thousand of them as they did all political prisoners, by hanging them on crosses to die.

The city was in turmoil, as the Gospel tells us. It was a terrible time, a fearful time, a time of despair. A time when hopelessness lurked in every shadow and threatened to undo them.

And yet...another story burned deep in their hearts. It was the ancient story of their faith, their trust in God, their firm belief that God would come and save them. It was a story that rang so true that they found courage to step out of their fear and turn to God.

They'd all heard about Jesus, and as word spread of his arrival, they began gathering along the sides of the road. Spreading their cloaks along the ground, waving palms and branches from the trees to salute their new king. "Save us", they cried, "save us, Son of David." At first, they thought he was the messiah they had so long awaited, the new ruler who would bring the long-awaited political victory.

They hailed him as a King, greeting him as they would any royalty, though I assure you, these folks hadn't seen any real royalty go by for a very long time. But they knew what to do when the moment came. Thousands of them, we imagine, shouting "Hosanna! Hosanna! Which means: "Save, we pray!" People bursting with joy and relief, with a sense of tremendous expectation and fulfillment. What a day!

They were all there on that first Palm Sunday. A large crowd gathered, a mixed lot of all who had heard Jesus teaching or been healed by his touch—the desperate poor, the unfulfilled rich, the healed, the unconvinced, the curious, the women and children, the sinners, all those who had been included in by his compassionate love along the way. The One sent to save us has come. His time has come. His kingdom is breaking into the world to change it forever.

And that was true—but *not* in the way they had imagined. This king was not to be the new monarch of the realm, not to be a political ruler such as the world had known. No. This was a new kind of king. A king who shared their life. A king who knew them and loved them still. The king of love. The ambassador of hope.

They couldn't grasp it all, yet, all that his reign would mean for them. But all that follows that day through the week ahead will open their eyes and the eyes of their hearts to see this new King of love.

For after this triumphant day we call Palm Sunday, Jesus, the King of Love, keeps going, riding on, down into the city, down into the valley, through the valley of the shadow of death. This they could not have imagined. In this new king, God incarnate, love goes down all the way to hell itself. The oldest version of the Apostles' Creed reads: "I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord: who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty."

God in Christ suffered and was crucified, dead and buried and descended into hell. To transform it all. To redeem it all. To sanctify it all. Christ is our bridge to life and life everlasting.

This is the king we greet this morning, Palm Sunday 2020, the king whose love is stronger than death, the king whose hope overcomes all fear. The king whose word is true, whose promises are sure and endure forever.

Hosanna, we cry!, to this our King. Come, King Jesus, and save us. Save us from fear. Save us from dread. Save us from anxiety and aimlessness. Save us from loneliness. Save us from forgetting to put our trust in you. Save us from failing to reach out to one another to offer words and gestures of hope and love. Save us from forgetting to cherish every precious moment of life in this, your glorious creation.

An early church father, Bishop Nicetus, put it this way... "if you would be wise, ask [Christ] who is wisdom. When it is too dark for you to see, seek Christ, for he is the light. Are you sick? Have recourse to him who is both doctor and health. Are you afraid of this or that? Remember that on all occasions he will stand by your side like an angel. If you find it hard to meet face to face the high majesty of the only-begotten, do not lose hope..."

Remember, he was made human to make it easy for everyone to approach God....If you are afraid that your body is failing and have a dread of death, remember that he is the resurrection, and can raise up what has fallen...if you do not know the way of salvation, look for Christ, for he is the road for souls..."

This is the king we greet this day. Let us wave our palms high! Hosanna, dear King Jesus. We greet you this day! Come and save us. Come and save us gracious Lord, now and forever