

Sermon – We Are Reliving the Gospel Reading Today

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We are reliving the gospel reading today, even as I speak to you right now. What a strange thought that their dusty, noisy parade would someday be commemorated like we are this morning. Even with our circumstances being so strangely different than theirs, we are back there all over again. In fact, this may be the most true-to-life Palm Sunday you've ever lived. The most famous parade is relived in our hearts and homes this morning, all across the globe.

Sure, we are not those people in the crowd, jostling and hollering together. Shoulder to shoulder, elbow to elbow and much closer than our current six foot distance we are keeping. For now, we are connected through the zeros and ones of computers, only hearing one another through comments in the typed conversation to the right of me. Maybe you want to comment 'hosanna' now – a virtual face in the crowd.

This is a familiar story. You've got the donkey and you've got the colt. You've got the coats thrown on the ground and the palm branches waved overhead. You've got the stones on standby, ready to cry out just in case the people are quiet. You've got the prophecies fulfilled with the events of the day. It is a wonderful and heartbreaking narrative. Jesus tearfully pausing outside the city, longing to gather her under his wing; all the while his face set like a flint stone for the bloody task set before him. And then there's the chanting, the collective 'save us' pleas of hosanna.

But I want to direct your eyes to an often overlooked statement. It is there in verse 10. The whole city was agitated as Jesus makes his entrance. Jerusalem—the City of Peace—in turmoil as Jesus comes to her. The whole city was asking, who is this? You can hear it in the hosannas exclaimed.

Troubled. Agitated. Disturbed.

The word means to quake or shake, to tremble with fear, tremor with confusion. We see it used to describe other pivot points in Jesus story – it is written that when Herod received word of Jesus' birth he was troubled, shaken, and all of Jerusalem with him. It also appears in the description of his death, as the ground beneath him shook violently—both there and in the temple. This tremendous turmoil was present at his birth and at his death, and here—during this Palm Sunday. Just think. All three of these moments were marked with people wondering who Jesus is. Some hopeful he was what they were expecting, others fearful that he was. Hosanna.

And the whole City of Peace was in turmoil asking.

Who is this?

Answers are not always easy. To be sure, standing in the crowd that day I could say: he does things normal people can't do. And we have never heard a teacher speak the way he speaks. Even the way he reads Torah is different. But, really, who is this? And Jerusalem quakes with wonder, confusion, excitement all the while. Hosanna.

And so Jesus rides in. We know him today as the Prince of Peace but on that day there wasn't much of it to be found.

Even though we aren't Jerusalem, I feel a little shaky this Palm Sunday. I think we all do. We are living through a time that will be written into history books. I think it is safe to say this is an unsettling time. And so I join in with the ancient and resounding hosanna.

And I, like them, wonder who Jesus is in the midst of it all. I look for the donkey and I look for the colt. And I look for the one riding into this situation. Where are you Jesus? Who are you?

Back then, according to our text this morning, they surmised this was Jesus the prophet from Nazareth. All factual details, but not the whole story.

Hosanna.

The new normal is that I shuttle between time alone at home and time surrounded by people in the hospital. As I work as a chaplain, we strive to bring emotional and spiritual ballast to those who impacted by this situation, both the staff and those we are caring for. We call the families of people being treated. We listen, and pray, and encourage.

At home, I watch loads of Netflix, and paint, and listen to music. And I work to sleep that uninterrupted sleep. Hosanna. Save us.

Like Jerusalem I have been stirred up, asking some questions through this experience.

Who are you Jesus? Or maybe—more honestly—where are you?

And I search, and I wonder, not only for those I serve but for myself.

In response, the Spirit whispers to my spirit, reassuring me. *I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I send you my Spirit. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Do not let your heart be troubled.*

I've been scanning the horizon for the figure to appear when he has been beside me the whole time. There is no need for me to go meet him at the city gate; he is already within.

And lo, I am with you always.

The Good News is that Jesus did not shun his mission. In his words, he has overcome. He stands on the other side of the valley, victorious. Hosanna.

We find ourselves at the start of holy week - a sacred time to reflect on Jesus passion. And for me, the stations don't demand as much imagination for me this time around. There is something newly concrete this year.

How are you heading into this week? What questions do you carry? What is the freight of your hosanna today?

If you have a trembling within, or if you wonder where God is in the midst of this, I encourage you to turn it into a prayer. Look above and about yourself, and you will feel his wing sheltering you. Quiet yourself and listen, you'll hear his breath within you. And make your own hosanna. I am learning all over again that he is faithful to hear and to answer.

Amen.