

A Sermon for DaySpring

By Burt L. Burleson

“A Clear Hosanna”

John 12: 12-16

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I believe in moments and in places where the goodness of life is so apparent it makes you want to shout. It's like it gets stuck on us... or in a place. I believe in places and in beings where the sheer joy, which is inherent in every fiber of creation, is available to us... we know it. It's like waking up to some Garden of Eden...

Love and belonging are words and concepts but sometimes we know them as realities. And in those moments, your heart says “amen.” And you are glad... and the gladness isn't just in you but all around you.

And in those places and moments where everything is so connected, you understand what the scriptures mean when they talk about the Spirit. You believe.

I hope you feel that here.

Some residue of grace...

in a place and in a people.

Maybe... here... you find you know something and sometimes on a Sunday morning God's words that resound over us, **“It is good... it is good... it is very good.”** **And you know you are good... and the world is... and life is.”** It's my favorite moment... watching and listening... before and after worship.

I think maybe there was some of that feeling on that original Palm Sunday. Oh, I know there are folks lurking in the shadows thinking polluting thoughts. But on the first Sunday of that first Holy Week, they were no match for the joy and beauty and connection that was taking place.

I want to believe that, though he wept some, it was a good day for Jesus.

Spring weather...

Sun shinning...

And so many hopeful people in one place.

It was a crowd and crowds by nature are always a mix of this and that...

so there were strangers... and the curious... and the passionate.

And I think in addition to all that... when Jesus rode down into town, he saw all sorts of loving and familiar faces. Like you do, when you walk in the Narthex and there are people you love who've made a difference in your life and your so glad they're there.

And you want to hug them...

That's such a gift ... to want to hug someone.

Life's good when a handshake isn't enough.

I think, when Jesus looked out on this crowd he saw person after person he wanted to hug... and they wanted to hug him back... They were all so connected and you could hear Eden's refrain again... **“and it was good.”**

Jesus smiles big to that goodness, looking out as he bounced along on that donkey's back.

He looks and there's the big clan from Bethany with Lazarus in the middle alive again and well.

And over to his right he looks... and his eyes meet a man's eyes that'd been dark, unseeing, all his life, until Jesus passed his way.

And right up on the curb, there's a man named Jairus... and he has a little girl perched up on his shoulders.

And on the left side, there's a tree and he looks up there to see a man named Zacchaeus waving wildly. It's just his favorite spot.

There's a stately looking man, Dr. Nicodemus to you, who ventures a knowing smile and lays his best coat in the road.

What a day for Jesus... and for everyone.

There are families with whom Jesus had stayed while he was on the road.

Old friends from Nazareth.

There are former teachers and mentors.

Folks who'd sat around campfires, theologizing.

The "Parents and Friends of Lepers Society" is there and lots of former lepers with them waving.

There's a group of Tax Collectors and Prostitutes having a great time... waving Palm branches and no one seems to mind that they're around.

There's a young married couple... and instead of palm branches they both have wine goblets raised in a toast to Jesus.

There's joy in the air and so many people who are saying amen to life and to Jesus, kind of like you do here on Sunday mornings, and so you can picture this. New friends and old friends... fellow students and pilgrims... healed people and forgiven folks.

But of course, it is a crowd... and in the crowd there are people there searching, and hungry, and some wishing they could get in on the goodness... just like there is here.

Lots of longing faces... and when they yell, "**Hosanna...**" they mean it in the Hebrew sense of the word, "**Save us.**" That's what the word means. They're not praising, they're pleading, "**save us and in a hurry.**"

Can you picture this?

A parent with a sick child in her arms... "**Save us, Jesus.**"

A poor person, hunger ridden, yelling Hosanna.

Someone else with that militant, political look in his eye,

"Save us! And now's the time."

You can see this part of the crowd, too can't you. Because all of us, are walking around in life (and in churches) needing some saving... And we may not own it out loud but if Jesus rode up here one Triumphant morning and you believed he could make a difference, you might get past your reticence, wave a branch, and yell Hosanna.

“Save me, Jesus. I’m such a cynic and sick of it.”

“Jesus... I’m so alone.”

“Jesus... I’m depressed, save me now.”

“My life’s out of control...it’s a mess... Hosanna.”

We’d line up out there in the parking lot.

“I need saving, Jesus... I’ve got this situation that’s hopeless.”

“I’ve got this son, who’s helpless.”

“I’ve got this illness... this habit... this question.”

So, this day is like any day, this crowd like any crowd... and like any group gathering in a church Narthex...

It’s full of goodness... belief. And it’s also full of problems. Jesus rides into a city full of wheat and tares... Plenty of celebration and plenty of expectation. Those who’ve been saved and those needing saving. And all of them needing to understand what that’s really about.

And I guess that’s why Jesus goes and grabs a donkey. John says that he gets the donkey after seeing the crowd. He seems to want to define himself... He’s never passing on the opportunity to preach so, the donkey is not only a ride into town but a mini sermon. This donkey preaches.

It’s a prophetic, peaceable symbol... a parable

Sort of small and vulnerable... not a strong and mighty message.

And certainly not what some wanted to see.

It’s Jesus’ way of saying again... **the salvation you want may not be the salvation you need.** And before you nod off because you’ve heard this sermon a million times about how the Jews wanted a military, political Messiah... listen up.

We... all of us... have yelled **“Hosanna,”** assuming we know how we need saving. We yell, **“Save me!”** assuming we now what salvation is.

“I know about salvation... Jesus gets me my ticket to heaven.” Now, what if Jesus actually wants to change and transform you? ... and prefers heaven not be populated with those whose religion is and... who’s hearts are... basically selfish. **“I got mine. I’m in.”** What if God’s salvation is about the world and not just your eternal destiny.

We all need saving but from what and to what?

You say you’re oppressed by someone and need rescuing? Maybe real salvation for you is learning to love your enemies.

You say you’re tired of that thorn in the flesh and so you yell Hosanna wanting Jesus to change you... When maybe your real salvation is coming to accept yourself as you are... to embrace what is human about you... limitations and all.

You think you need affirmation... but real salvation would be in discovering a self that doesn’t crave it so, or maybe at all.

Wishing God would save you with some peace of mind? But maybe this God wants to disturb you out of your slumber and sloth. Because the world needs you.

You want protection??? Maybe God wants you vulnerable.

You want certainty... and God offers you mystery.

You want boundaries... and God invites you to be one.

It's hard to know, really... just how we need saving. We stand curbside with palm branch in hand and think we know... perhaps.

But Jesus throws us off by riding a donkey... and throws us off even more by suffering and dying. And inviting us to follow him up that hill to that cross.

And the sight of that... ought to give us pause as we yell Hosanna. Yell it, by all means, your savior is here... but be careful with your expectations of just how Jesus is going to do that in your life.

It takes time to get this... John says, "**The disciples didn't get it until after he was glorified.**" Now, that's a big word for John... "Glorified... glory."

John says on page one that when you look at Jesus you're looking at God's glory. Ireneaus once said when you look at any human being fully alive, you're looking at God's glory.

It's a big word for John. The disciples really didn't understand salvation until after Jesus was glorified. It's all about Jesus being lifted up ... which is doubletalk... triple talk really...

Jesus is lifted up in crucifixion, in resurrection, and in ascension... and all of it shows us the glory of God. Not some ethereal glowing... But God's essence, God's presence... life-giving and life-giving presence.

Jesus is God's glory...

A real... completely alive... human being...

Coming to us... at peace... in peace...

Suffering... dying...

Descending and ascending.

If you can get that, if you can see that glory, you can begin to understand how it is you are being saved. Jesus is God's glory and surprise... he's riding on a little donkey. The Glory of God bounces into Jerusalem. God is so surprising in the way He saves us... you just never know.

Anne Lamott says it's interesting where we look for salvation and where we actually find it. You may only know it looking back. Or when some joy grabs you in the middle of life's muck. Or when your worst thing gets graced and used. It is interesting where we look and where it shows up.

I've been thinking all week... about a scene in another of John's writings... in Revelation. John is standing in a throne room in this vision. There's a crowd there too. It's full of things and people and animals... and elders...

And there's also a book in the room.

And as Paul Duke says, "**The book has a lot to tell... there's not only writing on the inside but all over the outside of it as well.**" The book has a lot to tell... it is to make known the mystery.

Only it may as well not be there...

because it's all sealed up.

It can't be opened.

It's shut tight.

And a voice in the throne room belts out... **"Can anyone open the book?"** And the answer is **"no"** ... no one... not in heaven and not on earth... no one.

And John says, **"I wept! Because there was no one."** What else is there to do... when answers so needed are locked tight? When salvation shouted for... seems so unattainable. When you can't get to it... what else is there to do?

But then, the voice says to John, **"Look, look, it's the Lion of Judah, the Root of David. He's triumphant and he can open it."**

And then there in that throne room, the oddest thing happens. John turns to look, with hope now, he turns to look... but there's no lion... and there's no regal looking descendant of David there to save.

All John sees is a little lamb. A vulnerable, weak, little lamb, **"looking as if it had been slain..."**

There's salvation...

and everyone in the room knows it.

And they get it.

And they bow down and they start singing... a new song, John says... one he hadn't heard before.

Everyone sings... the angels and the elders and the animals... as loud as they can, in one voice, **"Worthy is the lamb, who was slain. Worthy... to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor... and glory ... and praise, for ever and ever, for ever and ever. Amen!"**

It's a Palm Sunday sort of moment... only with a complete knowing. It's clear how Hosanna happens. In weakness. In vulnerability. In being slain, put down, but then rising up with healing in your wings. In Paschal Mystery... suffering mystery. There in John's dream, it's a clear Hosanna.

And we've gotten a glimpse of that... we'll get it again on Friday... a crucified glimpse. So, for now—wipe your tears, grab your palm branch... at least in your heart, grab one and wave it today. Your redeemer has come.

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