

PALM SUNDAY C 2025
Immanuel Highlands Episcopal Church
Wilmington, Delaware
April 13, 2025

It might be a confusing day. It must have been a confusing week. Keeping with that trend, I offer the following.

We're used to thinking of what's called the triumphant entry into Jerusalem as the beginning of Jesus' final week before he was crucified. Along with that we multiply and magnify the word "hosanna." Some have imagined dueling processions—Jesus through a side door on a donkey, while Pilate and Roman soldiers enter through the main gate of the city in chariots and on horseback.

Maybe Pilate did arrive that way. After all, thousands of believers coming into town to celebrate the liberation that made them who they are might just need a show of force to eliminate any thought of that happening again anytime soon. But there are other aspects to consider.

When Jesus faces his accusers, he asks them why they didn't arrest him earlier. He speaks as one who has been around awhile, and there are scholars who think he may have arrived several months earlier, during another festival, Sukkoth. It's a fall festival, celebrating the harvest they've been working toward all summer. Also called the "Feast of Booths," the celebration commands spending some time and eating meals on each of seven days in a *sukkoh*, a temporary dwelling made of—wait for it—palm branches. Palm fronds, called a *lulab*, are waved inside as part of the celebration. That's also described in Psalm 68.

Those cries of hosanna? They are pleas for help, taken from the Psalms. Psalm 118:25 contains the word, which is often translated "save us, we beseech you."

Those cries, echoed in all four Gospels, are heard by us as shouts of praise. But they are cries from those living under the oppressive boot of Rome. So, maybe there's something else, something more going on here other than a "yay God" moment.

In the Psalm, the people cry out to God for salvation from enemies, from possible destruction. I think that in the Gospel stories, they do the same. Word has gotten around that this man Jesus just might be the hoped-for Messiah, so it's not hard to imagine the people living under Roman occupation crying out once again for deliverance. "Hosanna. Save us. Lead us to success in overthrowing our oppressors."

Of course, that didn't happen the way they wanted it to, so those cries of "hosanna" didn't take long to turn into shouts to "crucify him." So religion allied itself with politics, because one needed the assistance of the other to make this crucifixion happen. It still does.

The confusion grows. Those who continued to believe that Jesus is the Messiah stand in utter dismay as they hear the sound of hammer striking nail, of cries of anguish

as gravity slowly elongates the torso and distorts the inner organs until the lungs can no longer function. They hear taunts of “save yourself” and derisive laughter as those wielding instruments of power depend on those things for salvation.

Then there’s that last gasp for air. And silence.

Those who followed Jesus, even if at a bit of a distance, find their confusion increasing as they wonder what comes next. What do we do now?

For now, they return home and wait. The combination of Passover and Sabbath are simultaneous events, but celebrating liberation doesn’t quite seem to be the right thing to do. “Are we next? Will there be a knock on my door during the night?” Fear adds to the confusion, and obliterates any sense of peace.

Yet, somewhere in the depths of the earth, from the realm of death, comes a faint cry as God’s Messiah enters. “Hosanna. Save us, we beseech you.”

You see, we can’t be saved except by the One who enters into all there is to be saved from. That is the meaning of incarnation, that birth we celebrate every winter. And we are saved by One who invites us to enter into his life by dying into ours. And as we live into his life, we share in that which is eternal, so that when we die, our own death becomes new life.

Sounds confusing, doesn’t it? But our life as followers of Jesus, the Christ, is to be a witness to God’s power overcoming our weakness working from within ourselves to reveal God’s glory that remains at work in the world God created. And that comes, not by wielding might, but by humbly speaking those words in their true sense. Hosanna. Save us, we beseech you.

Maybe when God reveals to each of us just how that happens, all will become as clear as the cloudless dawn of a new day.