

PALM/PASSION SUNDAY, MARCH 24, 2024

When I was a child Palm Sunday was a feast day all by itself and the Passion of Jesus was not read until Good Friday. So, Palm Sunday was a joyous day, like a mini Easter, with everyone waving their palms and saying or singing Hosanna! Hosanna sounded like “you’re awesome, Jesus, you rock, and we love you.” It wasn’t till I was an adult that I discovered that Hosanna really means save us now!

So, what did the people who gathered on that road that day want Jesus to save them from? It’s quite clear that they wanted to be free of the Roman occupation and the oppression the Roman’s perpetrated on them. They wanted to be free from the poverty that was choking the life out of them. They wanted to be saved from the religious restraints that put financial burdens on them. They wanted to be saved politically so they could rebuild their country and be free to be a mighty nation again. Those were tangible ideas they thought Jesus would fulfill for them and save them as they saw him as their next great king, like David, so it’s no wonder they shouted Hosanna.

What are the things we want to be saved from? A classroom of seventh graders at a parochial school were asked what does Jesus save you from? One student replied, “Jesus saves people from hell.” The priest that had asked the question felt it was the kind of answer that the class expected he wanted to hear instead of being an answer that had any real connection to their lives.

So, he pressed them further. He said, “Let me put it this way, if God or Jesus was here right now, what would God save you from?” One of the students raised her hand and said, “Death.” Another offered that Jesus could really help him out by saving him from an upcoming math test. Then one of the seventh graders said, “Pressure.” And another one said, “My parents’ expectations.” Another said, bullying. Then another, shy student, almost in a whisper said, “Fear. I want God to save me from my fears.” All of these answers struck the priest as being far more sincere than the hell answer he originally got although, he added that you could argue their comments gave a pretty clear picture of what “hell” looks like to a 7th grader.

Now, if we posed the same question to us adults and look deep into our souls and be honest as these students were, what would we say? When we wave our palms and boldly cry out, ‘Hosanna,’ do we dare imagine what we really want God in Jesus to save us from? Save me from anger, hatred, prejudice. Save me from cancer, depression, debt, conflict in my family. Save me from boredom, addiction, from the endless cycle of violence. Save me from humiliation, from staring at the ceiling at three a.m. wondering why I exist. Save me from bitterness, arrogance, loneliness. Save me, God, save me from my fears.”

Whatever we may hope God will save us from, Palm Sunday serves to remind us that Jesus has the power to bring us that salvation because he upended everyone’s expectations of him. The cross is the great equalizer. He knows our pain, our loneliness, betrayals, and our sorrows. And because he lived it, he is with us and can calm our fears, sustain us in our pain and even transform our lives. But we make the mistake if we believe all our fears and wants that we wish to be saved from will disappear instantaneously. Jesus saves us by walking the path with us, by giving us the strength to put one foot ahead of the other even when we can’t necessarily feel it or see it. God is always with us, as near as our next breath. This is how Jesus saves us. So, ask yourselves, is this the Jesus you want in your life? If it is then blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Save us now! Hosanna! Amen.