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“Hosanna”
 Isaiah 50:4-9 Mark 11:1-11 Philippians 2:5-10

INTRODUCTION TO Isaiah 50:4-9

This morning we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem surrounded by cheering throngs waving palms and singing Psalms. Centuries before, the prophet Isaiah envisioned a servant who could come and suffer and yet in the end be vindicated. Hear Isaiah's words that ring true years later through the life of our Savior Jesus.

INTRODUCTION TO MARK 11:1-11

Yesterday students and their supporters participated in the “March For Our Lives.” This morning we have come to remember another march, a march into Jerusalem that set in motion a series of events we have come to call Holy Week. It was the beginning of liberation for all the human family, liberation from the traps of sin and the sting of death. Hear the word of the Lord from the gospel of Mark 11:1-11

Let's pray. O God, thank you for this portion of your word. As we reflect on the events of that day, give us eyes to see how we not only can honor you with our lips but also be answers to the cries of those around us. Amen

The six-year-old came home from Palm Sunday services proudly carrying his palm. Mom and Dad quizzed him on his Sunday School lesson for the day. He responded enthusiastically, "Jesus came to Jerusalem on a donkey. And the happy people waved their palm branches and sang, “O Suzanna”

Not exactly. The crowds shouted, "Hosanna!" They shouted until they were hoarse. They laughed and cried and danced and sang. The disciples thought that it was the best day they had ever seen.

The palm branches and the shouts harked back 150 years to the triumph of the Maccabees and the overthrow of the brutal Roman ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes. In 167 B.C. Antiochus had precipitated a full-scale revolt when, having already forbidden the practice of Judaism on pain of death, he set up, right in the middle of the Jewish temple, an altar to Zeus and sacrificed a pig on it. Can you imagine a greater insult to Jews? Stinging from this outrage, an old man of priestly stock named Mattathias rounded up his five sons, all the weapons he could find, and a guerrilla war was launched. Old Mattathias soon died, but his son Judas, called Maccabeus (which means "hammer"), kept on and within three years was able to cleanse and to rededicate the desecrated temple.

It would be a full 20 years of more fighting. After Judas and a successor brother, Jonathan, had died in battle, a third brother, Simon, took over, and through his diplomacy achieved Judean independence that would begin a century of Jewish sovereignty.

Of course, this called for a great celebration. "On the twenty-third day of the second month, in the one hundred and seventy-first year, the Jews entered Jerusalem with praise and palm branches, and with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel." 1

It was a story as well known to the crowd in Jerusalem that day as July 4th and George Washington's defeat of the British is known to us.

Whatever may have been in the minds of the crowds the day that Jesus mounted a donkey and began a March into Jerusalem, whatever may have been in the minds of the Twelve, we know there is more going on than a parade honoring Jesus. It was a protest march hoping that once again another "Hammer" had come and was about to fall.

Here in Texas we have a lawyer who claims to be the Texas Hammer-Jim Adler, the tough, smart lawyer. (as if all others are wimpy and dumb?) Jesus was not another Hammer. He was not marching into Jerusalem to drive out Israel's enemies by force. He was a humble king, emptying himself and taking on himself our sin.—the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus marched into Jerusalem as one who would fall under a hammer, nailed to a cross.

Philippians 2:6-8, which we read earlier says, "Christ Jesus, who being in the very nature of God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Instead he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" He humbled himself. The word "humbled" himself literally meant to "empty" himself.

The crowds lining the route of the procession should be commended for their enthusiasm. They were not there just because they loved a parade. They were there because they wanted to believe. They had hope. Hope..." The reality is that, if we figure to survive in this world, we had better have hope.

My yesterday started with breakfast at the church. A small band of merry men gathered like we do every month, this month for breakfast tacos and doughnuts. We heard testimony from Mr. Eddie Williams, the oldest of 8 children, father of two daughters and a son, grandfather of 8 and husband of one, Ramonia Williams. He is a Viet Nam veteran, President of the Highlands Chamber of Commerce, recipient of a heart transplant, electrician, contractor, and co-founder of the Marcelous-Williams Resource Center in Highlands, that seeks to serve those in need, in some of the same ways that Love Network serves folks in Baytown. He and his wife were displaced by Hurricane Harvey. They were one of the first homes that were beneficiaries of the Mennonite Disaster Services remediation effort but still had to get up at 5:00 a.m. to get ready to make it our breakfast because he and his wife are staying with their daughter in Humble till they can return to their home.

Eddie shared that is one who served in the Bill Clinton Administration with Drug Czar Lee Brown on Drug Abuse prevention and the George W. Bush administrations on Faith

Based Initiatives. Speaking of Marches, he is one who was called on to bring peace between two competing Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Marches in the city of Houston. Think about that.

Over and over throughout his hour of sharing his testimony with us he affirmed and reaffirmed his trust in God. Through the challenges he has faced he has seen God's handiwork, God's control. Through it all he had hope.

After breakfast I went to the Town Square on Texas Avenue for their Egg Hunt. Why the city is holding an Easter Egg Hunt on Palm Sunday Eve I don't know. I guess it's a part of our "can't wait" culture. I wouldn't exactly call it a hunt. It was more of an Egg Scoop Up. The eggs were just lying on the ground like the result of a multicolored giant hail storm. Hundreds of children lined up to see how many they could scoop up. They had hope.

In case you're wondering where a lot of the flyers we had for folks to hand out last Sunday are, I slipped a lot of them into the brown bags that I helped hand out for the children to do their scooping. I have hope.

I got home about noon and sat down to eat my extra breakfast taco for lunch and turned on the TV to see a sea of people in the streets of Washington D.C. gathering to hear from the survivors of the Margery Stoneman Douglass High School Shooting, The Rally I watched was one of over 800 rallies including all 50 states of the United States, and in countries around the world. That tragedy that happened 5 weeks ago has grown to a national and international rally calling for something to be done about gun violence in our schools, and our communities. Speaker after speaker, mostly of young people under the age of 18 who have been impacted by the loss of friends and loved ones shared their call for CHANGE.

One of the youngest speakers was 9 year old Yolanda Renee King, the granddaughter of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. On April 4, 50 years ago, her grandfather was a victim of gun violence when he was assassinated in Memphis. Not far from where her grandfather delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech she said "I have a dream too. Enough is enough!" Then she led the crowd to repeat after her, "Spread the Word. Have you Heard? All across the nation. We are going to be a great generation." She has hope.

Scott Black Johnston writes, "The word 'Hosanna' literally means 'Save Us Now!' What do we mean when we wave our Palm branches and cry Hosanna? Do we dare imagine what we really want God to save us from? Save us from anger. Save us from cancer. Save us from depression. Save us from debt. Save us from the strife in my family. Save us from boredom. Save us from the endless cycle of violence. Save us from humiliation. Save us from staring at the ceiling at three a.m. wondering why we exist. Save us from bitterness. Save us from arrogance. Save us from loneliness. Save us, God, save us from our fears? 2

Have you ever lost hope? If you did was it because the answer to a heartfelt prayer did not come in the way expected? A husband or wife or child or friend was NOT delivered

from the cancer? A son or daughter was NOT kept free from drugs? A deserved promotion went to someone else? Or perhaps there was disappointment with the church, disappointment because the church sometimes proves to be not quite that "fellowship of kindred minds...like to that above." Those things can rob us of hope.

There are a lot of things wrong with this world. There are marches to come. Hopefully there are results to come. But it is hope that we need to sustain us. Indeed, it is ONLY hope that gets us through the darkest hours.

When Jesus straddled that little donkey and rode into Jerusalem he didn't answer some of the cries for Hosanna that day. He didn't Save Now from Roman oppression. He didn't even Save Now for himself. When Peter tried to fight those who came to take him he swung wildly and only managed to cut off an ear...which Jesus put back on and told Peter to back off. He said, "Those who live by the sword die by the sword."

In addition to the calls to Walk Out of class in memory of those who were killed at Parkland, some have started a Walk UP campaign, challenging students to walk up to students that sit alone at lunch, who appear to be isolated. They are issuing a Hosanna, a Save Now call to rally not only against hate but to rally around each other to reach out in love.

Yesterday one of the students that spoke quoted the grandfather of 9 year old Yolanda Renee King. "Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate...only love can do that."

That is the "Save Now" cry, that Hosanna cry that Jesus did answer by going to the cross. That is the "Save Now" cry that rang out the night Jesus was born when angels sang to shepherds, "Hosanna in the highest. Peace on Earth Goodwill to all." Jesus was answering the "Save Now" cry from the day he was born until the day he died and ever since. He went to the cross to Save Now from hate by driving it out with love—not by taking up of arms but by opening them to welcome all who cry out even now, "Save Now" ... "Hosanna." Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest. Lord we lift up your name. With hearts full of praise. Be exalted O Lord our God. Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna.

Let us pray. God of the prophets and the psalmist, we thank you for their testimony to your abiding presence. Through times of trial you accompany your people. For those who seek wisdom, you enlighten the mind. Amid the clamor of noisy marches, you are in the excitement and laughter. When the gathering disperses and your people are lonely your voice quiets their fears.

Be us now as we face our trials. Let them not be so overpowering that we succumb to their force. Give us the strength to withstand the pressure and courage to face boldly those times when our faith is tested.

Let us not be reserved in proclaiming the good news of Jesus. Keep us free from the fear of embarrassing ourselves. Give us the joy that makes constraint inappropriate, the assurance of new life that makes us willing to take risks. Set us in the midst of those who are seeking salvation. Help us to stand with them long enough to trust us, so together we can learn how Jesus sets people free.

Give us patience to sit with the lonely, those for whom crowds pose an unpleasant threat. If they seek comfort, open our arms to embrace them. If they need assurance, free our tongues from stammering, so we can offer them words of confidence. Through times of trial, you do indeed accompany your people. May your Spirit move us as we go forth to serve others in Christ's name.

1 David E. Leininger, *a World in Turmoil*.

2 Scott Black Johnson, *Save us*.