

[PRAYER] [BLANK] Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosannah in the highest! Today is the day that we celebrate the coming of Christ to Jerusalem, in his last days on earth. It is a joyful day, a day of wonder, a day of proclaiming the power of God, who came from heaven to earth in Jesus, the Christ, our Lord, our God, our Savior! We know that there is a cross around the corner from this story. We know that there is a last supper coming for Jesus and his followers. We will have time to remember these things on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday this week, and I invite you to come celebrate these important nights of Christian faith with us. But today, today is about the glory of God on earth, coming to fulfill God’s promises, in the city that God has made the center of the world’s faith.

Hosannah! Hosannah in the highest! Jesus came to Jerusalem, on the day we celebrate this Palm Sunday, as the disciples of Jesus laid down branches from palm trees in front of his path, at the entrance to Jerusalem. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a small donkey, an animal that he had asked someone to give to his disciples at the right time. Jesus planned everything about his arrival in Jerusalem. Jesus rode the donkey, knowing that it fulfilled the Bible prophecy of Zechariah, who saw, in a vision from God, the savior of God’s people coming to them, riding a young donkey. Jesus prepared everything to bring a time of praise and glory to God, on earth, as it is in heaven.

Why do we celebrate? Why should Palm Sunday matter to us, two thousand years later, as people seeking faith in Jesus? Maybe we do it because we love the joy of Palm Sunday, a time when we shout for joy at the coming of Jesus into our lives. We don’t really do much shouting at Christmas, do we? We don’t really do much shouting when the Magi visit Jesus, do we? We don’t really do much shouting when we listen to the stories of Jesus to healing people, forgiving sins, driving out evil spirits, taming the earth itself, raising the dead back to life. Do we? Hosannah! This is a day for shouting, shouting to celebrate the mighty works of God in Jesus Christ!

We shout for joy today, for everything that Jesus has done for us, even today. Two thousand years later, Jesus still touches our lives. Two thousand years later, the story of Jesus lives, and is as important, as relevant, and as real as ever. Two thousand years later, no one has walked on earth as Jesus did, no one has changed the world as Jesus did, no one has moved the highest and the lowest of people to obey the love of God as Jesus did. Hosannah! We follow Jesus today, with joy in our hearts, because the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ are worth shouting about!

Hosannah! We shout with joy today, because we are disciples of Jesus Christ, the ones who seek to change our lives to be shaped like the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We shout with joy, knowing that there will always be people, in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in our homes, in our streets, in our governments, in our politics, in our media, and yes, even in our churches, who will tell us, “Stop it! Stop making such a fuss about Jesus! Stop talking about how great God’s mighty works in Jesus Christ have been, and still are, and can still become!”

The world does not want people to hear about the mighty works of God in Jesus

Christ. The world wants us to shut up, roll over, and play dead, for the sake of power, for the sake of human tradition, for the sake of greed, for the sake of covering up sins that would come to light, through people who do not put the love of God in Jesus Christ first and foremost in their hearts. We shout for joy today for the life of Jesus Christ, covering Jesus with the praise that his disciples did when Jesus entered into Jerusalem, praise from the people who learned to leave everything behind but life with Jesus, for Jesus, in Jesus.

You see, as much as Palm Sunday is about Jesus and his mighty works, it is also about the most disciplined followers of Jesus, his disciples. Luke 19, Verse 39, reminds us that the Pharisees, the keepers of the religious status quo, for the sake of the political status quo, told Jesus to stop his disciples from shouting. Luke tells us that it was the disciples of Jesus, the ones who had seen the mighty works of Jesus, whose lives had been changed by the mighty works of Jesus, who put all their hopes in the mighty works of Jesus, it was these disciples who lifted up shouts of joy, shouts that rocked the corrupt status quo that enslaved the people of Israel. The world did not want shouts of joy from the disciples of Jesus. The world wanted silent obedience to stone-dead laws, stone-dead faith, and stone-dead rulers, who killed anyone who dared to shout joy for anything but their own power. To them, the disciples of Jesus shouted, Hosannah! Hosannah in the highest!

[STEPHEN] I have made a new friend in Uganda, recently. His name is Stephen. He is a young Methodist pastor, and he has helped already to found ten Methodist churches in Uganda.

[PREACH]

Nothing seems to stop this young man from proclaiming the mighty works of Jesus, not just through preaching,

[WELL]

but through bringing mercy, clean water, and much-needed hope, to people who have not been able to shout for joy. Through people like Stephen, new disciples of Jesus Christ are springing up all over the world today, literally shouting for the joy of Jesus touching their lives. Clean water, clean hearts, and the promise of real joy in Jesus, are turning these villages away from becoming stone-hearted people. Hosannah! Jesus is not done with God’s world, not anywhere, not because of anything that we think could stop Jesus. [BLANK]

Hosannah! Hosannah in the highest! The Pharisees, the stone-hearted leaders of religion, wanted all the shouting to stop. They wanted disciples who kept their faith in the mighty works of God in Jesus under wraps, off the streets. They rejected the humble ministries of Jesus, and rejected Jesus as the cornerstone of living faith. They didn’t want people like Stephen proclaiming to God’s world how things can change, how things can be more loving, how things can be more joyful, more pure, how things can change not just our private hearts, but the public life of God’s world, through faith in Jesus Christ. And Jesus let the Pharisees know that trying to make the disciples of Jesus to stop shouting was useless, because the mighty works of God in Jesus were the works of the God who made the very stones of the earth. Even God’s creation shouts out for joy at the mighty works of

God in Jesus! Heaven and earth are ready to proclaim the glory and the power of Jesus Christ! Heaven and earth are ready. Stephen is ready. Are we ready?

Our faith in Jesus Christ cannot be hidden. Our faith in Jesus Christ cannot be only a private matter. Our faith in Jesus Christ is meant to confront a world that says, “Stop!” to faith in God’s mighty works, and to let us hear God saying to us in our hearts, “Don’t stop! Don’t stop going where faith in Jesus Christ is taking you! Don’t stop knowing how much God is ready to help us change God’s world to look more like Jesus! Don’t let anyone, anything, even death itself, stop you from the love, the hope, the joy, the death-defying power of faith in Jesus Christ!”

Don’t stop. Don’t let your fears of being different, your fears of being vulnerable, your fears of committing, your fears of becoming something other than what you’ve been, your fears of not being good enough, pure enough, strong enough, young enough, old enough, rich enough, poor enough, well enough, or broken enough, stop you from living out your life that God has prepared for you, and for God’s world, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Hosannah! Hosannah in the highest! We are not supposed to stop believing in the mighty works of God that come to our lives, and God’s world, through faith in Jesus Christ. It may take time for us to have the faith to shout it. It may take sharing in the breaking of bread, on the night in which Jesus was betrayed, for us to shout it. It may take remembering what Jesus endured for us on a bloody cross, for us to shout it. And it might take beginning to believe deeply, in the very depths of our hearts, in what happened three days later, as the first light of a new day crept into an empty tomb. Whatever it takes, even the very stones of God’s earth are already shouting out with us, and for us, “Don’t stop!” Bring it on! Come, Jesus, come! Bring your mighty works into us! Bring us into Easter sunlight! Hosanna! Hosannah in the highest, now, and forever! Amen!