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*John 12:12-16*

*The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,’Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!’ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: ‘Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!’ His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.*

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This Lent, we’ve been viewing the story of Jesus through the eyes of Peter, which makes Palm Sunday a little problematic. This is because Peter isn’t named in any of the Gospels’ accounts of today’s passage. Therefore, you and I have to use our sanctified imagination to place Peter in the narrative. I believe it to be a safe assumption that Peter was well aware of the traditional pageantry that took place every year in Jerusalem around the Passover.

Periodically, the people of Jerusalem were summoned to the streets to give honor to the Roman Empire. The soldiers would parade into town in full military regalia. Perfectly polished armor reflecting the bright sun. Magnificent horses, freshly brushed. Sharpened steel of spears and swords. The timed steps of line after line of soldiers following their commander who rode in on an impressive stallion. The troops would carry the spoils of war on the way to the temple to offer sacrifices in thanksgiving for their latest military conquest.

And as the people watched this political theater, they would be compelled to sing songs of acclamation. Giving thanks that their Roman oppressors had “saved them.” The Hebrew word for “save us” has already be sung several times today in this very room: you and I know it better by the phrase “Hosanna.”

Peter would have known the song and dance all too well. He must have known what it was like to be pressured into showing “gratitude” to the very empire that taxed him and his fellow fisherman to the brink of poverty. He must have known what it was like to sing “Hosanna” to the Romans through gritted teeth and clinched fists. And this week of all weeks, the tensions would have been particularly potent.

It was Passover. The Hebrew story of socio-political liberation that no Roman could tolerate. After all, when you’re the occupying force oppressing a marginalized people, the last thing you want is for those very people to celebrate the story of being freed from the shackles of slavery. So you did the sensible thing. You double or triple your military presence in Jerusalem during the festival to make sure those Hebrews didn’t get any crazy ideas of uprising. Because if anyone is going to sing, “Save us, Hosanna!” it’d better be to Rome and *no one else.*

**And so, as Peter sang his song of loudest praise to Jesus as Jesus mimicked this political theater in a particularly subversive way, I wonder if he sang “Hosanna” with his hand on the hilt of his sword.** I wonder if this was the moment that Peter hoped Jesus would shed all this “spiritual” talk in order to provide what he and so many other Hebrews dreamed of: liberation from the Romans.

“Sure, I’ll sing ‘Hosanna,’” Peter thought to himself, “as long as this verse takes us to a refrain of political power, social influence, and vengeance upon those who’ve oppressed me and those I love.”

**Neighbors, us Christians sing many songs in this country. So many of us who invoke the name of Jesus sing “Hosanna” and “Alleluia” and sing to the “Prince of Peace” with our hands on the hilts of our swords.**

And hear this, dear friends: I struggle with this just like each of you. I love to worship Jesus…and I long for the day when those who disagree with me get theirs. I love to give honor to the “Prince of Peace”…and I impart violence upon creation by participating in systems that hurt the environment. I love to sing “Hosanna” to Jesus, asking him to be my sole savior…and then, in ways great and small, I look for salvation pretty much everywhere else, in ideologies, politicians, money, my own ego. Y’all, I struggle with this just like you.

But hear this, too, neighbor: **our struggle is not the end of the story.** This week marks the beginning of what we in the Christian church call Holy Week. And, with Peter, in just a few short days, we will be tempted to draw our own swords. And the Jesus who we follow *will* turn to us and tell us to put them away. **He’ll tell us to sing a different song, a different Hosanna, a non-violent refrain.**

And you and I can choose a different song. We have the option to sing a different hosanna each and every time we gather here to worship and, more importantly, our choices to sing different hosannas do not end the moment we leave this space. In fact, when we leave, our song is just beginning.

We can choose a truer, more non-violent form of Hosanna every time we step into the ballot box, or the council or school board meeting, or a peaceful protest, or the hospital room, or breaking bread with the person with who we vehemently disagree. Now it’s important to understand this: **singing our hosannas in the public space does *not* mean that we force our beliefs upon anyone else. There’s an alarming and dangerous movement in this country to impose Christian values upon our neighbors and to that, I firmly believe, Jesus would say, “put away your swords.” But we can - and should - lead by example.** For that’s the model of discipleship that Jesus taught.

Like Peter, we’ll learn. Like Peter, we’ll mess up. Like Peter, we’ll listen and we’ll sing and we’ll pray and we’ll serve and, hopefully, through all that, we’ll loosen our grip on our swords and, who knows, maybe the day will come that we’ll turn them into plowshares. Until that day comes, may we sing Hosanna. Until that day comes, as it has been promised, we’ll keep singing our songs of loudest praise to that fount of every blessing.

[*congregation sings “Come Thou Fount”*]

In the name of God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, may all of us, God’s children, say: **Amen.**