

## Hosanna!

**Sermon preached by Reverend Carmen Garrigan  
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Beavercreek, OH  
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Text: John 12:12-19**

**Prayer:** Lord God, we come to You this Holy Week thankful for the gift of Your Son. We pray that through this Holy Week we would grow to know Him more and that our hearts and lives would be spent in humble adoration. We dare pray along with the Apostle Paul that we would know the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of our own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ. We want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. We pray that Your Word would be living and active in our lives this day, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 12 of John's gospel prepares us for a decisive turn in the ministry of Jesus. It completes what most scholars and commentators understand to be the "Book of Signs": John's record of the miraculous actions of Jesus that point to who He is and Who has sent him. The last nine chapters of The Gospel of John are called the "Book of Glory," as all of the events and teachings in them surround the glorification of Jesus: that is His death on the cross and His resurrection three days later. The Book of Signs centers on the public ministry of Jesus, while the Book of Glory focuses on Jesus' private ministry as His audience narrows to the close circle of His disciples.

The crowd that we encounter today as Jesus enters Jerusalem seems to be a very different group of people than we will encounter on Good Friday. Today they go out to meet Him in a way customary only for a victorious king. They honor Him and shout His praises. Yet less than a week later their shouts are not to honor Jesus, but to crucify Him. During Jesus' trial, Pontius Pilate offers an option so that the blood of an innocent man will not be on his hands. He says this to the crowd regarding Jesus: "I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?" They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" (John 18:38-40)

The crowd, who just a few days earlier honored Jesus as a king, now want him executed. This change of tune in the crowds roar is critical for us to notice. How does the crowd go from seemingly having the right idea about Jesus to completely misunderstanding His mission in so few days?

While the exact answer to this question is hard for us to pinpoint, the shift in their behavior reveals a lot about human nature and the right worship of God.

The crowd was right in its recognition of Jesus as King. Recognizing Jesus' kingship is critical to a proper Christology, which is our set of beliefs about who Jesus is. I think the change of mind came because they had the wrong expectations about what kind of a king Jesus is.

In their history and in their time they longed for a political ruler who would restore their nation to its previous glory. Many who came to herald Jesus with palms had heard of His miraculous deeds and most recently, of how He raised Lazarus from the dead. In their minds, surely someone with that kind of power and authority could exercise enough arm strength to put their country back on track.

Even the palm branches they waved were symbolic of this desire. Palms had become for that people a symbol of Jewish nationalism. In the time between the testaments, during both major wars with Rome, reliefs of palms were stamped on the coins minted by the rebels. Thus their act of celebration as Jesus enters Jerusalem is by no means neutral.

The crowd's cry of "Hosanna!" was a familiar Aramaic phrase meaning "Save us now!" and occurs in a number of the psalms, as does the phrase "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Yet what comes next in their cheer departs from the intent of those phrases in the psalms. Their cry of "Blessed is the king of Israel!" gives us the impression that the crowd thinks they are greeting a national liberator.

Jesus' use of a young donkey (12:14) is an attempt to calm the zeal of the crowd, which John interprets for us with a quote from the Old Testament. This quote includes parts of Zephaniah 3:16, Isaiah 40:9, and Zechariah 9:9. The context of Zechariah 9 reveals that the gentle king riding on a donkey is not a man of chariots and war horses, swords and bows, but one who will bring peace to all nations. His gift is a gift of life, not conquest.<sup>1</sup>

It is this failed expectation and the disappointment in their personal and national hopes that seem to cause the shift in mood. We wonder how it is that the same crowd that greeted Jesus triumphantly begins to turn and will soon condemn the Lord of the universe to an excruciating and humiliating death.

Yet, when we turn the lenses of inquiry towards ourselves, our response to Jesus often turns sharply when our deepest desires and long held expectations are not met. Often, our expectations of Jesus are only slightly off as were the crowd's. They wanted a powerful king, and yes Jesus is a powerful king. Yet Jesus didn't do on their time table what they thought a powerful king should do.

Have you ever developed false hopes of what Jesus would do for you? I certainly have. Every time we baptize someone, the liturgy we use invites us to remember our own baptism. And while we didn't baptize anyone today, it is always good to remember the meaning of our baptism, and so I do so now with joy.

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<sup>1</sup> NIV Life Application Commentary by Gary M. Burge, pages 341-342

I was baptized when I was 7 or 8 years old. My parents and I had recently moved from Colorado Springs to the San Diego area. Before we moved, a nice neighbor lady invited me to go to the little Presbyterian Church down the street. That's where I first began to learn about Jesus.



After we moved, my mom decided it was time to get involved in church again and eventually we settled at a Presbyterian church not far from our home. Neither my mother nor I can recall exactly what prompted the desire, but about the same time we joined the church, I was quite eager to be baptized. Perhaps they had recently had a baptism in worship or I had attended a baptism of one of my cousins in the Catholic Church and liked the idea of the fanfare that went along with the occasion.

And so I communicated my desires to Pastor Joyce. I wanted to be baptized and I wanted to be baptized soon!! Being what I now understand to be a good adherent to Presbyterian Polity, Pastor Joyce affirmed my desire but did not act with undue haste or unnecessary delay. After a time of preparation I would be baptized.

I now can see the work of the Holy Spirit in prompting my young heart to grow in my discipleship and life in Christ, but my mom still claims I likely had some other motives, and she is probably right. Somehow along the line I had come across the concept that a baptism would equal a new dress, presents, and a party. And what little girl wouldn't want all that?

And so with water and the blessing of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I was united to Christ in His death and resurrection and claimed as Christ's own forever. Did I really know the full reality of what that meant at the time? Not entirely. Did I get the loot I desired: Oh yeah. I got a new frilly white dress (that's me with the awful late 80's hairdo), a party, and gifts. I still have the Precious Moments Bible I got from my mom and I can recall with glee the sweet pound puppy stuffed animal I received from my cousin Jenny. In case you don't remember, Pound Puppies were quite the rage in the late 80's. In fact they expanded the line to include adoptable plush cats called Pound Purries and in a 90's resurgence of the popularity for this line of toys, Pound Ponies!



So as an eight year old girl, Jesus met all of my hopes, dreams, and desires. I was baptized and I got all of the loot and the attention for which I had yearned.

The problem is, I still carry around a sense of entitlement to certain goods because of my connection to Jesus. I still hold all

sorts of hopes, dreams, and desires through Christ that have little or nothing to do with the Christ of Scripture. I still want Jesus and the loot. If I have been claimed as Christ's own forever through my baptism, then certainly such a relationship should entitle me to other privileges. These days however, my hopes and expectations for Jesus go far beyond expanding my Pound Puppies collection.

I belong to the Prince of Peace; doesn't that mean a life free from trials and tribulations, pain and suffering? Doesn't obeying God equate to a perfect family? If I labor for Christ's Kingdom, shouldn't I see instant fruit of my ministry? Certainly, being a daughter of the king shouldn't mean surrendering my will to God's purposes.

Like the crowds that came to wave their palm branches, we come to Jesus with our own set of spoken and unspoken expectations of what He will do for us. At first glance, some of our expectations seem on target, yet often when they are played out in the realities of life, we find that what we thought Jesus is here for isn't what is happening, and our tune changes. We then, like the crowd, turn our acclamations into accusations about our dashed hopes and shattered dreams of what the Messiah would do for us.

Yet praise God!! The story doesn't end on Good Friday with the bitter accusations of the crowd and the abandonment of Jesus' closest friends. Even in the midst of the shifting sands of the crowd's approval, Jesus was completing the perfect mission that His Father had given Him. At the end of John's gospel he shares that the purpose of what has been written is so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name (20:31).

The life Jesus offers us is life that is everlasting and eternal, life that is the light of men, life to the full. Jesus himself is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). God's plan of life to the full may not match ours. But ultimately, I trust that the Creator of life has an even better plan for life than I do.

This Palm Sunday we have waved branches and heralded Jesus as our king. But do we, like the crowds, have mistaken ideas of what King Jesus should do? Let us lay these ideas along with our palm branches at the foot of the cross. The baptismal life that Jesus offers us may not be the one we anticipated, but we can be sure that it is life to the full, and that Jesus himself is our life.

The Apostle Paul declares: "Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection." (Romans 6:3-5)

This promise of the resurrection is a sure hope that is worthy of our lives and worthy of our praise.

Following his account of the triumphant entry, the gospel writer John shares with us that, “At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him” (12:16).

Jesus’ kingship only makes sense in light of the resurrection. The book of Revelation, which was penned by the same John, gives us a glimpse of what worship will be like when we are with Jesus in the consummation of the resurrection.

Of that life it is written: I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-10)

In that day when we take up our palm branches again our worship will finally be pure and the truest of hopes will be accomplished! Until that day we cry out to God, “Hosanna!” “Save us now!” and we set our eyes on the cross, for we know that if we are united with Jesus in a death like His, we will certainly be united with Him in His resurrection. And that life is better than anything we could dream of for ourselves.

Amen.