

Palm Sunday
March 28, 2010
The Rev. Emily Richards

Jesus, Come and Save Us

We begin the holiest and most solemn week of the year for us Christians with a jubilant parade. We hold high our palm branches and sing praises to Jesus, our King as a way to remember and even to reenact that triumphal procession into Jerusalem. Excited and frenzied crowds had lined the road, cheering and hailing this preacher man from Nazareth. They tossed their cloaks as he rode among them. In the midst of their cheers, could be heard cries of Hosanna, Hosanna! This word Hosanna is not a common word in our religious vocabulary. In fact, the last time we probably heard it uttered was a year ago at our Palm Sunday service. In the midst of the frenzied fervor of the crowd, its force can get lost on us. Hosanna is a word that is difficult to define. Biblical scholars believe it is the combination of two words, one meaning to save or to deliver and the other meaning to beseech or to pray. The crowds were crying out to their long awaited Messiah, "We beseech you to deliver us." Save us from the tyranny and oppression. Save us from injustice. Save us from poverty. Save us from being lost and in despair. "Save us," they shout to Jesus, as he rides into Jerusalem.

The Rev. Dr. Scott Black Johnston, a Presbyterian minister tells of an experience with a 7th grade Sunday School class. "I met with the group to answer some questions scribbled on 3x5 cards that they wanted to pose to their pastor. Four of the twelve cards asked: 'Is Jesus the only way to salvation?' Being an annoying pastor, I told them that before I would answer that question, they had to answer

one for me. "Since salvation implies that you are being saved from something, what do you think Jesus is saving you from?" The first answer that came back was 'hell.' I must admit that my initial reaction when someone answers that 'hell' is what God saves us from is suspicion. I am suspicious: first, because, for a good portion of American Christians, this is the (obvious and only) 'right answer.' In other words, I had to wonder if the youth were thinking: Here is the preacher; the question is, 'What does Jesus save us from?' He must want us to respond, 'Hell.'"

"I decided to change tactics with them. 'Let me put it this way,' I said to them, 'if God was on the ball, what would God save you from?' Suddenly, our conversation got interesting. One fellow offered that God could really help him out by saving him from an upcoming math test. Then another said, "Pressure." And another youth said, 'My parents' expectations.' Then another, shy individual, almost in a whisper said, 'Fear.' I want God to save me from my fears." All of these answers struck me as more sincere than 'hell.' Although, I think you could argue that their comments gave a pretty clear picture of what 'hell' looks like to a 7th grader."

At the heart of the message of Holy Week are the cries of Hosanna heard not only from that crowd gathered outside the city gates, but from us sitting here today in these pews. With the same sincerity of those 7th graders we utter the plea from our lips, "Save me, Jesus!" Hosanna! Save me from bitterness and anger. Save me and my family from debt. Save my child from illness. Save me from the pain of divorce. Save me from loneliness and depression. Save me from the grief which is swallowing me whole. Save me from the fear of losing

my job, losing my security, losing my identity. Save me from indifference and arrogance and greed. Save me from myself.

Like the jubilant crowd we too want our Messiah to ride in victorious as our great and powerful King and to wipe away our suffering in one fell swoop-to save the day in dramatic fashion. Each year as we witness the events of this week, we can't help but marvel at exactly how they unfold before us. The answer to our cries of Hosanna comes through a meal with friends and through a master washing his disciples' feet. They come to us through a prayer of agony in a garden, through abandonment and betrayal, and finally through a lonely, agonizing procession to a place called Golgotha. The leaders and the soldiers stood at the foot of the cross, mocking Jesus and saying, "Save yourself, if you are the Messiah!" And yet in Jesus' selfless act of love on the cross, in staying up there and not saving himself, our Hosannas do not go unheard.

In the cross and the moments leading up to the cross God reaches out to us in complete vulnerability, acknowledging the deepest longings of our hearts, touching the broken places within us, experiencing the fullness of life and death in order to make us whole again. May we have the courage to embark on this journey, to be participants in this sacred story with palm branches in our hands and Hosannas on our lips, waiting for Jesus to come among us with the great expectation that somehow, some way He will indeed save us. May we cry out from the most sincere and deep places of our hearts knowing that in the cross our cries will be answered.