

The enormity of the Passion Gospel is set up by a stark contrast between its bleak depictions of human frailties and sinfulness, erected over and against the love of God in Christ, who humbled himself and became obedient unto death as he offered himself up as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. The scenes before us take us from the joy of the Triumphal Entry to the love and fear of the Last Supper, the grief of betrayal, the anguish in Gethsemane, and finally, the horrific agony of the cross. The drama it contains sweeps across the emotional landscape of our lives and leaves us breathless as it pushes us to our knees in holy reverence and godly fear.

The Gospel, which was read in parts today by various congregational members, depicts multiple responses to the person and work of Christ; and mirrors for us much of what our own imperfect responses to Christ look like. It is seen in **Peter's weakness. It is seen in the disciples' fearfulness, Pilate's self-interest, Caiaphas' lack of principle, Herod's triviality, the crowd's fickleness, and Judas' love of money and hardness of heart.** Through their stories, the masks over our own hearts are ripped away. We, too, find that our hearts are divided. I am like the crowd. I am like Peter. I am like Judas.

Consequently, we need our Lord to save and help us. This need for help was the cry of Palm Sunday when the crowd along the roadside shouted, “Hosanna! “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”¹

¹ Luke 19:38 and Mark 11:9

The word, Hosanna, was an expression used in Hebrew that was more than a cry for help.² In contemporary language, it means, “Save us now!” In its context, it was a prayer for God’s blessing upon the Messiah, who would bring to pass the salvation promised to Israel through the prophets and fulfilled through his suffering servant.

This confident cry for help was to the one who would bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. It was addressed to the meek and lowly one who came in the form of a servant. Yet through him, God would overcome all the pain and misery that burdens this sinful world. The story of Christ’s passion changes everything, and the enormity of its love begs a response.

The one who came to Jerusalem humbly riding on a donkey now comes to us. Will we welcome him? Will we enter Holy Week not as mere observers but as participants? In other words, will we worship him? Will we serve him? May the shout of Hosanna be our heartfelt cry today as we begin “the contemplation of those mighty acts”³ that not only bring life and immortality but also “peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!”⁴ Amen.

² Strong’s Concordance, #5614, hosanna, save, we pray

³ Collect for the Liturgy of the Palms, for Palm Sunday, BCP p. 270

⁴ Luke 19:38