



SAVE US

March 28, 2021

Growing up in the church, this was ALWAYS Palm Sunday, that was never in question, anymore than that December 24th was Christmas Eve. The 6th Sunday of Lent, choirs sang of "All Glory, Laud, Honor" and "Hosanna Loud Hosanna", everyone received a long green blade of Palm grass and shouted "Hosanna," although all we knew it meant, was next Week was Easter, when we would shout "He is Risen!" In the 1980s someone suddenly recognized that the Church celebrated Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, then celebrated the Resurrection as being BIGGER! Much like Barnum & Bailey following the Man being Shot out of a Canon, with Men and Women throwing themselves from Trapeze to Trapeze! However we did not even acknowledge anything had happened in between, and those in between things were as insignificant as The Last Supper on Maundy Thursday and that Jesus was Crucified on Good Friday! Now as recently as 30 years before, across the Country, schools and businesses shut down at Noon on Wednesday for midweek religious observances, but by the 1980s, church leaders by and large recognized it is really hard getting anyone to come to worship, at night, during the week. So after Centuries of remembering Jesus' Entry into David's Royal City riding on a borrowed donkey AND having ignored the Last Supper and Crucifixion, they had the idea to ignore the donkey, ignore what it means for the Messiah to be recognized at Jerusalem, and renamed this as "Passion Sunday," to emphasize Jesus' Suffering. DO we really need greater emphasis on his suffering? Over 500,000 Americans have died from this disease. Just as we begin to hope anew, last weekend the City of Atlanta 8 Asian-Americans were murdered in Hate. On Monday in Boulder, Colorado a mass shooter killed 10 people at a grocery store where people were lining up to get their vaccine shots. The only idea that occurs to me, the words I want to pray to God are "DEAR GOD, SAVE US"!

In response, the Gospels have this beautiful story: The SETTING is Shortly before the Passover, Jesus and his disciples had made their way to the City of Bethphage, then to Bethany, and was coming down the road to the Mount of Olives outside the City Gate of Jerusalem. While they usually walked, for a Prophet, one who would be recognized as The Messiah, A Son of David sent from God to enter into Jerusalem was a big deal! Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy kind of big-deal. So instead of sneaking into town, or sauntering down the road, Jesus told the disciples to borrow an animal for him to ride upon. One says a Donkey (which in the Old Testament was seen in contrast to a White Stallion, as an animal of righteousness and justice for the poor). I have never fully understood the other variations as one says a Colt on which no one has ever ridden, which is not the image we have of Jesus entry, unless the Colt was influenced by whom the colt was carrying. Another describes that he was

astride both a donkey and her foal which again emphasizes the entry of a new kingdom, but is also completely impractical.

At the entry of someone famous, people began laying their coats on the ground to make a carpet for him to enter upon, others cut branches from the trees, children cluster round. Norman Rockwell on the cover of The Saturday Evening Post could not have had a happier, more human interest image for Palm Sunday. At which point, I have to believe God has a sense of humor, because according to each of the Gospels: what did the People shout? "HOSANNA" An archaic Hebrew Phrase, we have not used even in worship since last year on Palm Sunday. In Hebrew this was a contraction from two words YAH-SHAH meaning TO SAVE, the same root as the name Joshua, or Jesus; combined with the suffix NAW meaning WE PRAY; so HAHSAH-NAH meant the people were shouting SAVE US, SON OF DAVID, SAVE US! Many years ago, with a Confirmation Class of 14 year olds, we were trying to teach the concept of SALVATION, which is not an easy idea to grasp. I asked the class "IF SALVATION IS ABOUT BEING SAVED FROM SOMETHING. WHAT DO YOU THINK JESUS WAS SUPPOSED TO SAVE US FROM?" Instantly one of the boys said "HELL." At the time, I had the suspicion, he just wanted to see my reaction to his saying "H- E-Double Hockey Sticks" to a minister in Church. And while a potential response, once my suspicions were raised, I felt like his answer was a little too pat. Much as when the Physician asks you "AND HOW OFTEN DO YOU GET EXERCISE?" or the DENTISTS inquires "HOW OFTEN DO YOU FLOSS?" we know the answers they are seeking. SO, we described to the class that the people were being persecuted by the ROMAN LEGION, Taxed and Beaten for being in the way, and for being hungry; then we read this passage from Mark, AND about the people crying out SAVE US WE PRAY and asked again, WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY WANTED TO BE SAVED FROM? What would you want to be saved from? One used the coverall phrase "PRESSURE;" another chimed in "FEAR;" a 3rd said "DEATH." Then we said, "And WHAT DO YOU WANT GOD TO SAVE YOU FROM?" One said "PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS" another said "MR.CRUZ's GEOMETRY TEST," another spoke in whisper "TO BE SAVED FROM MY FEARS." They seemed to understand "SON OF DAVID SAVE US" pretty well. Can we be as honest? Can we pray to God SAVE US, daring to confess:
I WANT TO BE SAVED FROM ANGER.

I WANT TO BE SAVED FROM A FIXED INCOME.

I PRAY TO BE SAVED FROM BEING ALONE.

I PRAY TO GOD TO BE SAVED FROM NOT

BEING CLOSE WITH MY FAMILY.
ELSE LOSING IT.

I AM AFRAID OF SOMEONE
THE PRESSURE

OF LIFE, THE PRESSURE OF OTHERS' EXPECTATIONS IS TOO MUCH.
DEPRESSION IS KILLING US.

I AM AFRAID OF THE CANCERS, OF METASTHESIZED CELLS & HATE
GROUPS, THAT ONLY WANT DEATH. I FEAR THE HELL OF LIVING SOME
DAYS.

The Bible has been around in one form or another for close to 2000 years, first as oral tradition, later as written stories, so I have to believe every element particularly when each of the gospels agrees on it, must serve a purpose. So WHY PALM BRANCHES? Reading through the Latter Books of the Prophets, we come to

recognize that the People of Israel descended from Abraham, the great Monarchy of King David and King Solomon, was destroyed by the Syrians and Assyrians; and decades later the Remnant that was the Nation of Judah were conquered by the Babylonians, then the Persians, the Egyptians, the Medes, the Greeks and eventually the Romans. At one point this people who had been subjugated by so many different peoples were able to mint their own coins. On the coin was a bending Palm Branch, signifying that we may be oppressed and beaten, even enslaved, but like the palm we can yield and bend without breaking. Later, the Roman Empire minted their own coin with a broken palm branch.

There are these minute references, which foreshadow where we are going. Jesus looked around Jerusalem and realized it was already too late... And the next morning, Jesus went looking for good fruit on the Fig Tree and cursed it for not presenting any fruit, that imply the world was not ready without the Crucifixion for SALVATION.

At the beginning of the Passover that year, the people greeted Jesus, naming their prayers and desires: SAVE US FROM DEATH, SAVE US FROM ROMAN OPPRESSION, SAVE US FROM THE PRESSURES UPON US! Five days later, the people gave up on him, gave up on their prayers, and handed him over to be executed NOT for having committed a crime, but handed him over to be exterminated in the most horrible way because HE HAD NOT SAVED US ON OUR TERMS WHEN WE WANTED.