

# Hosanna

As Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, a very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. Both the crowd that went ahead of him and the one that followed were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' Hosanna literally means "save us", derived from Psalm 118: 25, "Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!" It became a liturgical cry for God's mercy, involving the deepest hopes of the people of God.

Have you ever seen a video of a flash mob? Picture a train station or a mall, some large public place with people all around. Music starts, and one or two people start dancing in the middle of the crowd. More and more people join them, all dancing the same dance until hundreds of people are all moving together, dancing the same steps, perfectly coordinated, in tune with each other and the music. I imagine that the people watching, who had been living their lives and going about their business, must be very delighted by the spectacle, and they wish they knew the steps so they could also join in the dance.

The crowd in Matthew is like a flash mob; they appear at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, coming to him from all around the region. By the end of the Sermon on the Mount, many more people are listening to his teaching. They are repeatedly astounded at his authority as they see his capacity to heal the sick, and they are amazed when he casts out demons, noting that "never has anything like this been seen in Israel". The crowd, even larger, begin to wonder whether Jesus might be the Son of David. Before the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, huge crowds have had their bellies filled twice with just a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. It is not surprising, then, that the mass of followers show such enthusiasm when Jesus rides into the city. Heightening the significance of the procession is the fact that it begins at the Mount of Olives, the traditional location where the Messiah is expected to appear. So the crowds, in tune with Christ, in the steps that God has laid out, are crying for salvation, 'Hosanna, save us'.

We encounter another group of people in Jerusalem, the holy city, who were in turmoil, asking, 'who is this?', as if they had never heard about Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. Jerusalem was the seat of power for the religious and political authorities under the temple. The temple in Jerusalem was an enormous structure, famous throughout the Roman world. It had been rebuilt by Herod and was his most ambitious building project. The temple contained many separate areas, including places to buy and sell animals for sacrifice, kiosks for foreign visitors to change money into the Temple currency, and offices for local and imperial authorities. The temple, which was supposed to be a house of prayer, was a profitable enterprise, supported by the religious hierarchy, and was used to maintain the status and wealth of their religion. The conflict between Jesus and the chief priests and scribes was inescapable because of their different goals: maintaining a system that worked very well for its elite governors, or creating a new way for the whole people of God to know and do God's will. Jesus didn't avoid the conflict; instead he broke through it with peace.

Notice the different responses to Jesus from the two different groups. Crowds of people, powerless, marginalized men, women and children, are shouting 'Hosanna, save us'. A much smaller group of socially and religiously powerful people are disturbed with Christ's amazing works, and become angry at the crowd's response to him – but they cannot stop this outpouring of adulation and hope. The outsiders are drawn closer to Jesus, and their longing for justice opens their mouths to say, 'Hosanna'. The echo of Hosanna still continues today in many places, through diverse voices. I am going to give you just a couple of examples.

I once joined a march for the missing women of the Downtown Eastside. I was one of the hundreds of people who marched through the Downtown Eastside with tears on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Beginning in the early 1990s, women from Vancouver's downtown eastside were going missing; the total of missing women now stands at over sixty. The memorial march started with a healing ceremony at Carnegie Community Centre for the families and the friends of the missing women. While I was listening to their heartfelt stories, I felt not only their pain and anger, but also their hopes and dreams for justice; I heard 'Hosanna, save this unjust and indifferent society'.

As you know, we had a Japanese Tsunami Relief event in our community. Inspired by the song, "What Can I Do?" we helped to do our share to support the people of Japan and help them recover from their crippling tragedy. I was so proud of our community and our church. Through the sincere and unconditional love shown by so many, I heard "Hosanna, save our brothers and sisters, save our planet".

The echo of 'hosanna' continues with our prayers for our loved ones, and with our actions to make a difference to our community and to the world. Yet, can our 'Hosanna' last forever? I always wonder how the crowds' enthusiastic welcome, 'Hosanna' became the resentful cry, 'Crucify him'. Were they two different kinds of crowds? Were the crowds who shouted 'Hosanna' hiding themselves in fear of the powerful authorities? Or was it the same crowd, with many of the same people, their joy and hope transformed into scorn and anger in the course of a few short days?

For whatever reason, we see that no one stood up for Jesus, and no one spoke for him. Jesus, who was always with people, suffered alone and died alone. As the Bible says in Psalm 118:22, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." And the mystery continues, in verse 23, "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes". Our responsibility is to sing 'Hosanna' beyond the triumphal entry into Jerusalem; it continues through the times of agonizing questions and unsatisfactory answers, because that's where God's possibilities start. May God help us to continue singing 'Hosanna', and help us to listen to the cries of others; we are the crowd together, forever echoing 'Hosanna' in the world.