



Palm Sunday, Apr. 14, 2019

Are You Ready to Shout Hosanna?  
Pastor Vern Christopherson

**Matthew 21:1-11 NRSV**

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” <sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfil what had been spoken through the prophet, saying, <sup>5</sup>“Tell the daughter of Zion, look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

<sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; <sup>7</sup>they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup>A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and 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!”

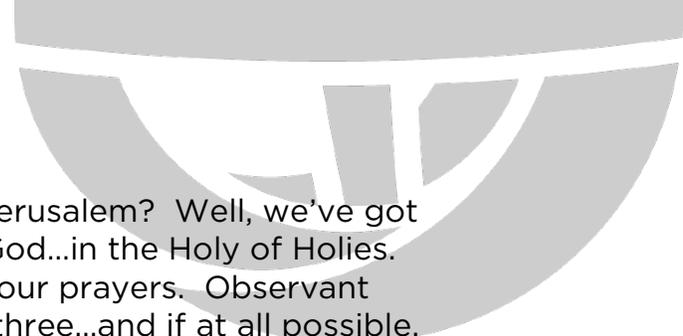
<sup>10</sup>When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?”

<sup>11</sup>The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Shalom. My name is Eliezer, Eliezer of Jerusalem. I’ve got a big job. I’m the guy they call after the music dies down, the shouting’s over, and the parade has passed by. I’m the guy who sweeps the streets.

I know, I know, I can see some of you snickering out there. I’ve heard all the jokes about spending most of my time leaning on my broomstick. It’s not exactly a cushy job, but I like it. Been at it a long time. Guys like me are essential. You can’t run a city as big as Jerusalem without us – especially during the holidays.

Maybe you’ve heard of our holidays. There are many of them, but the big three are Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. They bring people into



town - lots of them. Why do people come to Jerusalem? Well, we've got the temple here. That's where we go to meet God...in the Holy of Holies. We give our offerings, make our sacrifices, say our prayers. Observant Jews are required to come to town for the big three...and if at all possible, to bring their families too. Folks come back year after year - jamming the city, crowding the inns, making the money changers rich, and of course, littering the streets. Tourists! Can live with them! Can't live without them!

I guess I shouldn't complain. Jerusalem does belong to all the people. It's our capital city. Once upon a time there were kings here. And there will be kings here again someday, you mark my words. We'll have a courageous, conquering king. He'll come riding in on a big, white horse, flags flying, trumpets sounding. He'll show those dreadful Romans they can't push around God's chosen people anymore.

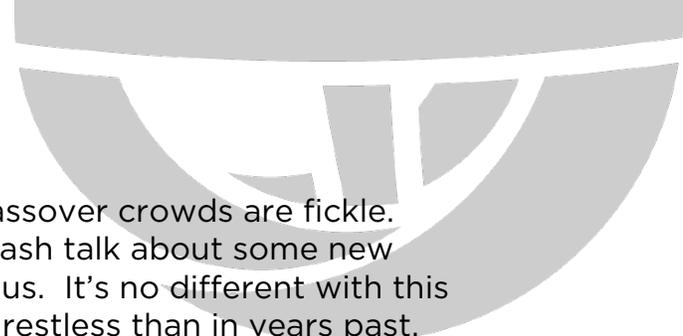
This city is the center of our hopes and dreams. Our history goes way back. When people come here, they get to thinking about King David and King Solomon, the glory days. They're proud to be Jewish again. And that's important. These days that's mighty important because of the iron grip of Rome.

Passover is coming soon. It's a great time for my people. It's the holiday celebrating our independence. At Passover we have a meal called the Seder. Everything in it reminds us that once we were nothing but a bunch of slaves. Then God came along and claimed us as God's own people, holy and precious.

To get ready for the Seder, we slaughter a lamb and bake unleavened bread. We eat the food and hear the story, and my goodness, it's like we're right there slaving away to make old Pharaoh's bricks. We can feel the sweat on our brow and hear the crack of the whip. But wait, ten plagues later, we're rushing to put sandals on our feet and to gather up our possessions. There's no time for the bread to rise. We're leaving. Out into the wilderness we go, not exactly sure where we're going, but trusting God to lead the way. Soon Pharaoh's army is chasing after us, but we're walking safely through the Red Sea. Then the waters of the sea come rushing back in the nick of time. We're safe. And we're free!

Truth be told, after the meal is over, we feel hopeful. If God could do it once, surely God could do it again. God could make us alive in ways we've never dreamed possible. Oh, it may sound too good to be true, but we need to believe it. It reminds us that God's has not forgotten us, despite the way things look sometimes.





I'm bracing myself for Passover, because the Passover crowds are fickle. I've seen them come and go. There's usually brash talk about some new deliverer, some new Messiah to come and save us. It's no different with this year's crowd, except maybe they're even more restless than in years past. They proved that when the Galilean rode into town.

It's because of that Galilean that I'm working overtime today. You see all the palm branches scattered about. They're leftover from the parade. It all started early in the morning. I was close by. Doing my job. Saw the whole thing. People were out and about, getting ready for the week. We heard something in the distance, and it sounded like singing.

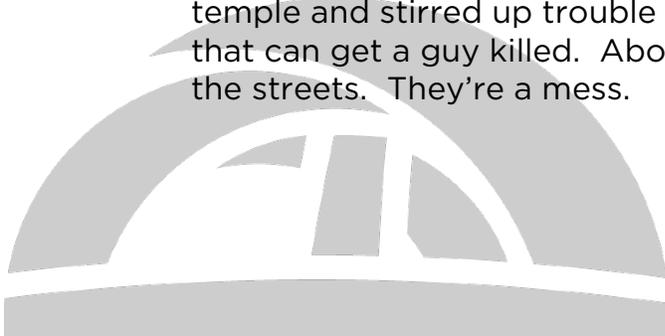
I looked up, and so did the others. There he was, still a way's off, riding on a donkey. There were people crowding around him. He looked like some sort of rabbi, with a group of disciples tagging along behind.

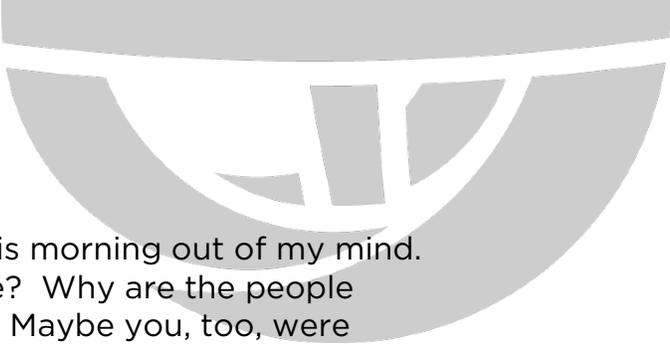
At first glance, the rabbi looked impressive: strong, broad shoulders. Dark, flowing hair. Even at a distance, even on a humble donkey, he had a kind of quiet dignity. It took my breath away. I stopped what I was doing and stared. I wondered: Who is this man and what has he done to attract such attention?

That's when things really got interesting. Some children ran to get a closer look. Bystanders joined in the singing. Before long people were cutting down palm branches and waving them, like he was some sort of king. They were dancing and shouting, "Hosanna, hosanna." They were singing, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." I couldn't believe it. "Son of David," they called him. "King Jesus" they called him. To be honest, he did have the look of a man for whom others might drop everything and follow. But really - to call him messiah, the anointed one - I guess I wasn't sure. That kind of talk is dangerous. It can get a guy killed.

There was something else going on too. It's hard to put a finger on it. As the Galilean rode in, in the middle of all the commotion, his eyes looked like they were about a thousand miles away. Oh, he acknowledged the people's cheers. He seemed pleased to hear them. He was especially drawn to the children. But it looked like his mind was far in the distance. And there was a sadness about him. I couldn't quite place it.

Almost as quickly as the parade got started, it was over. Several followed the Galilean as he rode into the heart of the city. They say he went to the temple and stirred up trouble there. Uh oh, better be careful. Actions like that can get a guy killed. About the only thing left to do now is clean up the streets. They're a mess.





Still, for some reason I can't get the events of this morning out of my mind. I keep wondering: "Who is that man from Galilee? Why are the people shouting hosanna? Maybe you were with them. Maybe you, too, were shouting hosanna - God save us? If so, why? Like David and Solomon and kings of old, maybe he is more than an ordinary man, but is he the sort of man for whom you would drop everything and follow? Would you?"

Before you answer that, let remind of the story of Passover. Moses was only one man, and a stuttering one at that. It seemed a little crazy to go up against old Pharaoh and demand that he set us free. But he did. It seemed a little crazy to slaughter a lamb and smear blood on our doorposts. But we did. It seemed a little crazy to head into turbulent waters of the Red Sea, but we did. And God did something utterly remarkable: God rescued us from Egypt and our nation was born.

When I recall those events of long ago, they somehow seem closer. I want to believe that God has not forgotten us. I want to trust that God can come and set us free again. Who's to say what God can do...and whom God can use to do it?

They sang that the Galilean was coming in the name of the Lord. Could he be the one? Could he be our king? And if so, what about that look of sadness in his eyes? From my vantage point, I don't know what to expect. Considering the excitement of this morning, and the shape of our streets, we're going to be in for quite a week. My gut tells me: Things might get worse before they get better.

