



Sermon Series: "Where is the Good News?: Finding the Good News in less than ideal circumstances.

First Lesson: Psalm 31: 9-16

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21: 1-11

Sermon title: "Where is the Good News?: Hosanna"

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We are beginning a new series entitled, "Where is the Good News: Finding the good news in less than ideal circumstances," and let me just say that I am ever so grateful for the Holy Spirit guiding us all to engage this question from both a theological and practical perspective....where is the good news?

For any time that you and I may find ourselves in situations that are less than ideal, it can be difficult to see the positive, when there is so much anguish and turmoil that surrounds us;

It can be virtually impossible to find the good news, when you and I are in our own metaphorical valleys; making it difficult to envision the glorious view from the mountain top.

Especially in light of all of our present circumstances;

For a lot of us, being stuck at home **is our current valley situation;**

For this current pandemic crisis that we are in, where the death toll was approaching 7,000 as I was preparing this sermon, but now I am certain has unfortunately doubled by now as I am preaching this message; I don't know about you church family, **but it is difficult** to see where the good news could possibly be?

And yet the Holy Spirit has invited me to critically engage the scriptures these next coming weeks up through Pentecost, to discover the good news that might bring life to all of us;

For the entire scriptural readings that have been carefully compiled together by the church thousands of years ago into what scholars refer to as our biblical canon, but most of us call it the Bible, is a sacred compilation of texts that points to the good news....

For the good news essentially, is a prophecy being fulfilled by

way of the triune God coming to the Earth in human form to walk with us, teach us and point us all to a better way of life and being....

A mission that will prove to be the biggest sacrifice for God, for even with this realization that God is indeed amongst humanity at its lowest point; this truth will not be glorified and celebrated and even recognized by all; in fact it will only be recognized by a few comparatively speaking;

Making the question, "where is the good news," become even more relevant and complicated for the people back then and for our world today....

And so this, my friends is the Easter journey that you and I will embark upon;

And so the prayer is for you and I during this process; to be able to wrestle with this question; where is the good news and hopefully receive clarity and perhaps even have our faith strengthened as a result of.

And so our journey and quest for the good news begins with Palm Sunday;

Where churches all over who acknowledge Palm Sunday, are most likely lamenting over a beloved tradition being abruptly ended;

For just as there was a pageantry or fanfare that occurred on this day (which scholars chronologically acknowledge to be a Monday within our text); because of people waving palm branches to celebrate a king who would come and rescue them from their corrupt government and leadership;

In churches all across the globe, it is disheartening not to see our own version of this fanfare celebration, by way of our own children and youth and congregation waving their palm branches at the opening of our Sunday morning celebration as well, singing and shouting, "Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest."

I would be remiss though without taking the time to acknowledge First Church's Flower Ministry for making sure that we had palm branches in our worship background for online viewers to see and so for this, I give thanks.

But family as I began to peel back this actual event and began to research it a little further, I realize that this Palm Sunday on the surface seems to be the good news all by itself; for this event declares that Jesus is coming, Jesus is here and all shall be well...right?!

But you and I will soon learn that this occasion is just like any other thing that you and I might have experienced in our own lives; that there is more to it than what meets the eye.

For in searching for the good news within this specific text, the

Holy Spirit has lead me to zone in on the word Hosanna as you might notice in my sermon title;

And so I was intrigued when I learned that the word Hosanna actually has two meanings....

You see in church tradition I have always heard Hosanna to be translated as essentially praise....

Hosanna is within this text to be translated and assumed to be used as an expression of adoration or praise;

And so synonyms of praise that have highly influenced some of our musical choices around this particular liturgical season are analogous words such as alleluia, hurrah and hurray;

And so I am not certain what your experience has been but Hosanna has always in my own church experience been a word to highlight nothing but praise;

So I was intrigued to learn that the word Hosanna that you and I normally see used as another expression of praise, was originally translated to be a plea; a petition even...

Hosanna originally was a prayer that before the first century was translated to say "Save, I/ we beseech you.....or another way of saying this is founded in Psalm 118:25...Lord, please save us.

But after the first century, it turned into something like a religious "hurrah," with no more literal meaning than a "Good-bye," which was originally a prayer, "God be with you."

And so in this context a God be with you prayer is normally a prayer of protection and strength for the individual.

So in summary, Hosanna means to praise and hosanna also is a petition asking for protection;

Also, as we dissect this fan-fare occasion a little further, the second thing that struck me was that Jesus was being introduced for the first time in Jerusalem, but you and I would be highly mistaken if we were to assume that all of the people were expecting to see Jesus.

On the contrary, what I would suspect some of the people were expecting to see, was some warrior king on a beautiful strong horse, that would come to overturn their corrupt leadership and government;

For this occasion was presented as a "triumphal entry" where as a side note, palms were only mentioned in the book of John and Matthew; they are not mentioned in Mark or Luke;

So from the Matthean perspective, this occasion was set up to honor a wartime hero who would obtain victory over Jerusalem and set things right again.

So essentially what the townspeople and community were expecting to see I would imagine, was some greater King that would annihilate King Herod and all of his minions...

But what they got was a lowly servant named Jesus who was not

riding on a brilliant horse;

On the contrary, Jesus was riding in on the colt of the donkey; and the presence of this donkey was to represent that Jesus was coming in peace.

And as a side note, there is some discrepancy among Matthew and the other disciples' books within the bible on whether it was just the donkey there, or the donkey and her colt; but for me these details are not as important per se;

But what is important to highlight is that Jesus was not what this town was expecting, nor this donkey or colt or donkey and colt; making the overall point that there was nothing triumphal about this entry at all for the people, so much so that this led many if not most of them to ask the question, "who is this?"

If I could expand this question into my own words the crowd was most likely thinking or asking among themselves, "**who is this strange man on this donkey and what about this is good news if any?**"

Who is this man and how is he going to be the one to bring triumph to any of us?

How is Jesus going to help the oppressed and gain the victory with a donkey and nothing to fight back with?

Now I would be remiss if I did not highlight that some people might have known or heard about who Jesus was.

There were some who perhaps knew who Jesus was and even heard of the amazing Lazarus story being awakened from the dead prior to.

But all in all, I would suggest that not every one knew or understood what was really happening...

And I am mostly positive that none of them knew that this would be the first step towards Jesus crucifixion and that their shouts of praise would eventually be replaced with shouts of vilification.

And so stepping out of the text for a moment to attempt to make this relevant for us today; some of us are asking the very same questions I would imagine.

Who is going to help us end this pandemic crisis for once and for all?

Who is going to help us all get back to work and get our economy back to where it needs to be again?

Who is going to help us to see our families and be able to get back to doing the things that we once cherished and loved again?

Reading a lot of posts on social media, I have even heard folks ask those who believe in God, "when is your God going to come down and save us all?"

Where is the good news and is there any good news, inquiring minds would all like to know?!

And for me the answer is not direct or clear; but my hope

does lie in something that I am noticing is occurring in our first lesson today in Psalm 31 that was read earlier.

You see the assumed writer David was in a very precarious situation;

For David too starts off with similar implied questions at the beginning of his psalm;

He is crying out essentially the first translation of Hosanna that I mentioned in verse 9 of his psalm; where he is asking God to *Have mercy on him because he is depressed.....*”

And you and I can see David’s depression linger within this psalm for a while;

For David in his psalm expressed that his life was consumed with sadness;

At one point in verse 12 David said *I am forgotten, like I’m dead.....* family have you ever felt like this before?

So David is and was the epitome of what I am certain many of us have been feeling while in these strange times;

But then if you were to read a little further, you and I will notice a shift occur within David’s spirit;

Where David’s Hosanna’s shifts from a place of deep lament and turns into an expression of praise;

And it is in verse 14 where, David says, *But see? I trust you, Lord.*

And family on the surface it could seem that this **shift of spirit** came out of nowhere.

For there is no evidence contained within this psalm that would suggest that David saw a vision, or even encountered an angel that would give him this new sense of assurance and hope;

And yet there **was still a shift** that occurred within him that informed his spirit that everything would all work out....

There was a shift that turned David’s lament into a moment of praise;

There was a shift that turned David’s doubt into assurance where David was able to minister to his own dying spirit and approach his depression and woes and say, *I affirm, “You are my God,”*

So in my theological mind David was essentially declaring that since God was a part of him, nothing and no thing could or would consume him....

And so family and friends, this shift that I am naming, I believe is the good news that is within this text...

You see the good news was not in a king wartime hero riding on his stallion to come and save a dying world;

The good news is the **innate shift** that I wholeheartedly believe that God has deposited within each and every one of us, that tells us that all will be well even when there is no detectable evidence;

It is the shift that brings the joy in the morning after crying all night;

It is the shift that brings courage to those who initially didn't think they could stand.

It is the shift that keeps people pressing forward and determined to keep trying....

I think of the bus driver who lost his life to the COVID-19 virus roughly 4 days after a passenger coughed on him

I think about the doctors and the nurses and the teachers and all of the people who are providing services in a very scary time; they are doing this, putting all of their lives on the line so that our world can survive....

So it **is this shift** that is inside of each of us; that gets each of us out of the bed; that wills us to do our best and love our best, sometimes beyond our perceivable capacity;

It is the Holy Spirit that surrounds each of us that whispers in our ears and encourages us and allows our inner self **to shift to a place** of determination; that is the good news that Jesus came to bring;

So in effect, looking at this text with a new set of eyes, Jesus didn't really need all of the pomp and circumstances did he?

Jesus didn't need a strong stallion;

Jesus didn't need to be clothed in royalty;

Jesus didn't even need weapons.....

In fact his appearance and what he chose to ride on was all intentional as a way to tell the world that **good news sometimes doesn't always come** in the way you and I will think it will come;

Good news doesn't always come in the package we expect to receive it in;

For it doesn't take all of that when the good news was that Jesus was there and would never leave humanity;

The good news is that Jesus is here to awaken the downtrodden whose strength might be failing;

The good news is that Jesus is here to remind us that our Hosannas of lament **will shift** to a great Hosanna of praise;

Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest

Blessed its the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!

Let the Church say Amen!

Peace and Love!

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