

“Hosanna Interruptus”

April 14, 2019

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: John 12: 12-19

Today we celebrate Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This day has been a long time coming for Jesus. For years Jesus has been living out the life of God on earth, and the people are finally recognizing Him for who He is. He has done enough healings for people to recognize them as more than coincidences or tricks. He has performed enough miracles that people are seeing His power comes from beyond this world. He has done enough teaching that the people are realizing His intimate knowledge of God could not be grasped from a distance. He had to be from God, if not God Himself. Here in the Gospel of John, it was the Lazarus encounter that pushed people across the finish line. The people knew Lazarus. They saw how sick he was. They saw him die. They were there for the funeral and burial. Then 4 days later, after his body had begun to stink with decay, they saw Jesus call him from the tomb. They can still see Lazarus walking and talking among them. Jesus actually brought life from the clutches of death. You can't fake that.

It was apparent to everyone with eyes to see and ears to hear that Jesus was the real deal, and it was time to celebrate. Here in the 12th chapter of John, it sounds like the triumphal entry wasn't really planned, but just happened. Starting in verse 12, "The next day a great crowd who had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' And Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it." The people saw Jesus and responded with an impromptu parade with yells and cheers and a palm branch red carpet. It is as if the people had had enough of being ruled by death. They saw Jesus as a man of life, a giver of life. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Fear was no longer going to rule their lives because with Jesus, they can overcome everything. The blind can see. The deaf can hear. The dead are brought back to life. This is their new king. This is the person they want ruling over them. This is the One they want to follow. The overwhelming response to Jesus is summed up in the last verse of our reading as Jesus' rivals look at what is going on and proclaim, "You see that you can do nothing; look, the world has gone after Him."

I would love to cheer today. I would love to simply join the celebration and shout hosanna, but I know how this week ends. I have read ahead, and I know what happens. Today Jesus' rivals proclaim there is nothing they can do, but by mid-week they have hatched a new plan. By Thursday they have put their plan in motion. It is a plan of bribery. A plan of betrayal. A carefully constructed marketing scheme that will manipulate the crowd. Some of the same crowd that is shouting hosanna today will be shouting "crucify Him" on Friday. And on Friday, they will hang Jesus on a cross until He is dead. I would love to get all excited with the crowds in our reading for today. I would love to shout hosanna with them, and proclaim Jesus as the Son of God, but the cross is in the way. The One who was supposed to have real power. Power to bring sight to the blind, mobility to the lame, and even breath to the dead. The One who was supposed to

have harnessed the power of life was killed like an evil criminal. I want to shout hosanna to the giver of life, but the cross gets in the way.

Has that ever happened to you? The cross got in your way? God is supposed to look at what people do, and bring appropriate consequences. You know, when they are mean and hurtful, God is supposed to make bad things happen to them. When we are good, treat others with kindness, and follow God's teaching; God should make good things happen for us: money, happiness, security, health, and love. (Never mind that that puts me in the driver seat and makes God respond to me and what I am doing as opposed to me responding to God.) That is the way we expect God to run the world. But the cross gets in the way. Jesus is the One who did everything right. He is the One who followed God's will in all things. He should have been blessed beyond measure. But He died in agony on the cross. If God couldn't protect Jesus from this kind of ugly death, how can He be the giver of life? This cross is in the way.

The people gathered and sang for Jesus because He was freeing them. He was freeing them from the fear of death and therefore freeing them from being afraid of everything that threatens them. Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead. We are free from the powers of this world. Free from all those who are trying to make us conform. Jesus can heal anything! Then the very powers we are supposed to be freed from, capture Jesus and hang Him on a cross until He is dead. Why didn't God protect Jesus? If God couldn't protect His Own Son, why should I believe He would do something for me? The cross really gets in the way.

It happens, I sometimes get lost in this world and judge God by earthly standards, but when I get out of the way and let God be God, the cross isn't in the way, it is the way. I didn't include it in this morning's reading, but the 3 verses just before it tell of a plot to kill Lazarus. Yes, Jesus raised Lazarus from the grave and Lazarus stood as a living, breathing testament to the power of God. But Lazarus still died. He was resuscitated but only temporarily. A temporary victory is too small for God. God is the God of life. He is not the God of short, fragile life but the God of eternal life.

Jesus did all those things the people claimed He did. Jesus frees us from death and therefore frees us of being afraid of everything that threatens us. We are free from the powers of this world. Free from all those who are trying to make us conform. Jesus can heal anything, but He didn't do it by avoiding death. That was not the answer. He did it by going through death to bring us to life on the other side

The cross isn't in the way, it is the way. When we follow Jesus through this life – follow His teaching, follow His lifestyle, have faith and live the faith that His way is more powerful than the world's way – then we will continue to follow Him all the way through death to everlasting life on the other side.

It is easy to get caught up in this world and start to believe that this is the ultimate definition of reality, but this world is too small. It is just temporary. We don't want to get lost in it. When we

do, the cross really gets in our way. But the cross is not in the way, it is the way. Not the way to avoid death and hardship, but the way through death and hardship to eternal life on the other side. And the One who can take me beyond this life – that is the One I want follow. That is the One I can shout hosanna for. That is the One I want to claim as my King.

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