

We are nearing the end of our Lenten journey together. And what a Lent it's been! I saw on Facebook several pastors sharing a picture declaring this Lent to be "the lentiest lent that ever Lented." We've had to give up so much during this season of Lent. We've had to reexamine everything in our church and society. Now we have nothing but time to focus our energy and attention on things that really matter in life: namely, family and God. It really has been quite the Lent, hasn't it?

Today is Palm Sunday, also known as Passion Sunday. In our congregation here in Farmington, IL, we usually have our Easter Egg hunt today followed by a community brunch. During worship, we have the children perform some songs during worship. Obviously, those events are cancelled, which makes me sad. I really enjoyed these events last year, even if it snowed on Palm Sunday and Easter last year. Remember when all we had to worry about last year was planning the Easter Egg hunt indoors instead of outside? I don't know about you, but I long for that time now. So much has happened in the last several weeks. Everything is being disrupted. Traditions are being cancelled. People are staying home instead of venturing out. Things are different, and dare I say, even scary right now. So much is up in the air, it can be exhausting trying to process everything. The disciples of Jesus in today's passage knew well what life was like with diseases and pandemics, and they didn't have Netflix or Hulu or cell phones! Most of the people of Jerusalem were living in poverty, while a few elites had wealth and power. People were starving and hungry. It was an uncertain time. While things are vastly different for people in the United States in 2020, the same underlining uncertainty and fear about our future is there. We humans are creatures of habit. I think that what we want more than anything else is stability and normalcy, and we aren't getting much of either today.

With all the instability, uncertainty, change, and fear in our lives, we gather together today to worship Jesus and to cry out to Jesus, "save us." That's what the word Hosanna means, after all. Save us! The crowds in today's passage were crying out to Jesus to overthrow their Roman occupiers and restore their land to self-governance. They were crying out to Jesus to restore justice and stability and wholeness for them and their land. That is the hope that they placed in the coming Messiah. They were looking to Jesus to be the kind of Messiah who would be a political and military ruler. And we Christians claim that Jesus was and is and will be the Messiah, but not a Messiah that ushers in military conquest. Rather, by and large, Christians claim Jesus' entire ministry on Earth worked to recreate society that would be centered on God's peace and justice and rooted in deep and abiding love. As James O'Duke says in his devotional on this passage found in Feasting on the Word, "Lordship, indeed even messianic lordship, is here defined in terms of servanthood. Gentleness, humility, peaceableness, mercy, and self-giving acts of generosity and compassion are marks of God's domain." Jesus came into Jerusalem carrying his message of servanthood and love.

And, it seems that time and time again, we missed the point. In the years following Jesus' message of gentleness, humility, peace, mercy, and self-giving acts of generosity and compassion, we've continued to develop systems that still oppress people. Far too often, we hoard supplies rather than sharing them. We see people fighting over rolls of toilet paper. So many people are continually ignoring the rules and systems put in place to keep everybody safe. We need to hear Jesus' Palm Sunday message again. He didn't ride into Jerusalem with a conquering army to drive out the Romans. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and colt, demonstrating to the world that a true king and messiah would be humble and gentle. Crowds centered on Jesus' love would gather to cry hosanna, save us, rather than kill or hoard or fight.

And yet, even knowing our human tendencies to sin and mess up, I see glimpses of the goodness and hope and that Jesus taught. I see people calling friends and family they haven't talked to in a long time in order to reconnect and stay in touch. I see other people sharing food and supplies rather than hoarding and fighting. I see people, for the most part, staying home rather than going out. Please stay home unless it's to get food or supplies or a walk while maintaining physical distancing. We have an opportunity this Palm Sunday to continue our Lenten practice of reexamining the practices and customs of our lives, our society, and our churches. This is a unique time in our history. We have the opportunity to redefine who we want to be. In many ways, I completely get the desire to go back to normal, to go back to the way things used to be. As I said earlier, it's human nature to want normalcy. But we have the opportunity to change

things for the better, to center our lives and communities on Jesus Christ. So, let us continue to shout to Jesus Christ, “Hosanna! Save us!” Amen and amen.