

Message: “Hosanna!”

In her book “Waiting for God” Simone Weil wrote,

“There are people who are like a person continually making high jumps in the hope that, if they jump higher every day, a time will come when they will no longer fall back but will go right up to the sky. But they’re so focused on jumping they never look at the sky.

That’s like most of us: we can’t take a single step toward heaven.

It’s not in our power. But, if we look toward heaven with an open heart and mind, God comes and takes us up. God raises us easily.”

May we cry, “Hosanna, save us!”

This world is a harsh place. Everywhere we look, we see trouble.

From the intentional unkindness and cruelty we show to immigrants, to the neglect of our environment, to our polarized and paralyzed political system, there’s trouble. Gas prices are on the rise, as are grocery prices. We’re in a war we don’t understand. Depression is increasing. We feel hopeless and alone, swimming in a sea of uncertainty and doubt.

Sadly, we often look to ourselves for answers. We seek out those who think like we think, want what we want, suffer as we suffer. You may know the phrase “misery loves company.”

We turn to anyone and everyone except God. For centuries, we’ve tried to pull Jesus down from the cross. We’d rather see him as a human, someone who got swept up by politics and was over their head until it was too late. And it ended badly. To some, his followers lied to us. They manipulated a vulnerable crowd into believing the supernatural was not only real, but possible. We think we give hope, not God.

We’re like a person jumping every day in hopes we’ll be able to fly.

But it’s not within us. We can’t raise ourselves. We can’t save ourselves. The idea of “lifting yourself up by your bootstraps” is false. Give it a try. It’s an impossible task for us to do on our own.

We are like addicts. We’re so focused on ourselves, we ignore the impact we have on those around us, those who love us. We lie, cheat, steal and then defend ourselves. We blame our circumstances, society, parents and history. We make promises and then break them, over and over again, breaking hearts when we do.

And we never get better. Sure, we have regrets. We regret the loss of love, trust, friendship and the life we could have had. Some days, we find the will to resist the lure, until we fall off the wagon, to no one's surprise. This continues until we finally reach a breaking point, a point of no return. Then we have a choice.

Do we stay on the path of hopelessness or are we willing to admit to ourselves we can't do it on our own, we need a higher power to help us? One choice takes our life, the second choice gives us life.

One means we continue to live in a me-first way, the second means we put another-first. Both are filled with uncertainty and are disorienting, but only one gives us real hope.

May we cry, "Hosanna, save us!"

When we're ready to look up and believe, God raises us up. What's impossible for us is so easy for God. All we need to do is truly see and believe. When we put aside our fear of change, we find ourselves in a new and unfamiliar place. The disciples knew this.

You can't help but wonder what was going through the disciples' minds as they traveled to Jerusalem. They didn't expect Jesus to send them out to do a little donkey rustling. This must have added to the anxiety about going where they were considered unwanted agitators, stirring people up against the status quo and the powers that be.

We don't know if it was prearranged, or something mystical, or part of a plan. Maybe it doesn't matter. There's so much we don't know, yet we're called to get in the car. Or get in line. The bus is leaving. The train is at the station. The procession is happening.

Where are you?

That's the real Palm Sunday question: Where are you? Where are we? There are so many roles in this drama, and we find ourselves flitting from one to another based on our mood or personal circumstances.

But what if we got to choose? What if it isn't which one fits us, or which one others would choose for us, based on our personality profile or Enneagram number? What if we could choose?

Would we choose to tag along on the donkey mission? Would we go without questioning the rather odd and seemingly out-of-the-blue directive from Jesus, heading out to find a donkey and a colt tied and waiting for a Messiah to climb on board?

In other words, would we decide to listen to what Jesus said and follow the path, even when it doesn't make sense or seems out of step with current political and social trends? Would we be willing to risk loving enemies, welcoming the stranger, and praying for those who persecute us, even when everyone else thinks we're crazy?

And our only response is, "The Lord has need of it."

Or would we tag along with the other disciples, walking a risky road to challenge the center of power? Maybe we have a clue about what's happening, or maybe we're just caught up in the spirit of the event. It has a party feel, a parade vibe, so we go along. And for a moment, we stop worrying about what *might* happen and lean into what *is happening*.

How many times have we heard Jesus say, "Do not be afraid"?

And for a moment, we aren't. Fear is replaced with love, our love for Jesus and the way he brings. Our love for one another, and the sense of wholeness we are becoming pushes aside personal fears of failure or inadequacy. This perfect love casts out fear. So, we march along behind him, with him.

We may choose this.

Or we aren't ready for donkey-hunting or parade-marching.

We think it asks too much of us. There is so much we don't know. There is so much we lack. And we're filled with fear. Yet, we feel called to something.

So, we stand along the side of the road. Maybe we wave as the parade passes by. Maybe we find a branch and wave it, to extend our reach, to go higher, to be seen.

And maybe we shout, "Hosanna!" As he passes by, riding that bemused donkey with its colt trotting alongside, we shout, "Hosanna!" Maybe it means hello, or hooray, or "Hi, Jesus." Or maybe, somewhere underneath all the excitement, there's a deeper memory recalling the original translation of the word on everyone's lips: "*Hosanna! Save us.*"

Save us, please. Save us now. We may not be ready for it all, but at least we are there. Along the road, waving and hoping, we stand and ask for salvation, whatever that means, wherever it leads.

We're there, somewhere, on a mission or bystanding. We're there. This means we're there when the tone changes, as when a conductor calls for a minor chord, or there's thunder in the distance. There's a change in the air.

And the lips of those who shouted "Hosanna!" are now twisted in anger and disappointment and are saying, "Crucify him!"

It's as if something went wrong. It's as if the soundtrack is off and the instruments are out of tune.

And still, we hear the question, "Where are you?"

Where do we stand when everything changes? Where are we when the parade moves from celebration to condemnation? Whose marching orders do we follow now?

May we cry, "Hosanna, save us!"

Let us pray ...

Matthew 21:1-11 (CEB)

When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave two disciples a task. He said to them, “Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that their master needs them.” He sent them off right away. Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said, *Say to Daughter Zion, “Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the donkey’s offspring.”* The disciples went and did just as Jesus had ordered them. They brought the donkey and the colt and laid their clothes on them. Then he sat on them.

Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

And when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up.

“Who is this?” they asked. The crowds answered, “It’s the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”