

Palm Sunday

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday, the crowds were singing from Psalm 118. This is a psalm for the Jewish Passover. It was a psalm for pilgrims coming to Jerusalem, to worship at the temple. It was a song that would have been on everyone's mind on that first Palm Sunday. What is amazing is that they applied the words of the psalm to Jesus!

The people cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!" - from Psalm 118: 25 - 26.

The word "Hosanna" that they sang is related to the Hebrew word for "save" or "save now". That is exactly what we find in Psalm 118: 25: "Save now, I pray, O LORD," literally, or "Hosanna, O LORD". The psalmist is calling on the LORD God to save him!

In the rest of the Psalm the poet proclaims God's love as seen in his mighty deeds of salvation, experienced by his people over many ages. But verse 25 looks forward to some future deliverance.

The Jews were under Roman occupation, even though they were living in the Promised Land. And so the people were eagerly awaiting the Messiah, whom they hoped would restore the kingdom of David and they expected it to be a political earthly kingdom.

This is why the crowds echoed Psalm 118: 26 of the psalm as they said "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!" Their songs and exited procession show that they were hoping that Jesus was the Messiah. And indeed Jesus was, and is, but not in the way that they thought. He was indeed the blessed One who came in the name of the Lord. He would bring salvation and deliverance to God's people. He would bring a restored kingdom, but a kingdom that was better than the old kingdom in the earthly Promised Land. He would bring an eternal, heavenly kingdom!

Ironically, the crowds spoke the truth. They rightly chose this psalm and applied it to Jesus. This irony comes to a climax at the cross of Jesus. Psalm 118 ends with a call for a festival sacrifice. And Jesus was this sacrifice. Although on Palm Sunday they cried to Jesus, "Save!", "Save!", soon they would cry out, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" And when they cried out to crucify him, they were calling out the words of Psalm 118:27, "Bind the sacrifice!" Bring on the festival sacrifice! Prepare the Passover lamb! Crucify him!

When we sang our Hosanna's yesterday, on Palm Sunday, we hailed the One, our eternal King and Lord, who came to save, by giving his life.

Hosanna! Save us, oh crucified, risen Lord!
Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!
Hosanna!