

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

## HOSANNA: SAVE US NOW, WE PRAY

Matt 21:9 & Jn 12:20-42; Lent 6A, Palm-Passion; March 28-29, 2026

Christians still use Old Testament Hebrew words such as: Amen, Hallelujah, Sabaoth, and Hosanna. We heard the word, “hosanna,” in today’s Gospel. As Jesus rode a small donkey into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the Jewish pilgrims sang, **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”**

This was from a psalm they sang each year at Passover time as they ascended Mount Zion where the temple was. Psalm 118:25: **“Hosanna/Save us, we pray, O LORD!”** Hosanna means, “save us” in Hebrew. The Passover pilgrims hailed Jesus as their Messiah King born in the line of David. Some in the crowd hoped Jesus would lead an armed rebellion to overthrow the Romans who had conquered and occupied their land. That was not the sort of saving Jesus was there to accomplish. God had other plans for His Son.

We hail Jesus as our Savior by using that old word, “hosanna,” and pray for His salvation to come to us. What sort of Savior did God send us? From what do we need saving? How did Jesus accomplish this salvation for us? Jesus explained His saving work in the Passion Sunday Gospel Reading from John 12. Looking ahead to the difficult task of saving that God the Father had given Him to do, Jesus asked Himself, **“And what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’?”** Would our Savior pray for Himself to be saved?

The first day of spring has passed, and our thoughts are starting to focus on the growing season. Gardeners are considering what they want to raise this year. Farmers will soon be out in their fields preparing them for planting. If gardens and farm fields are going to bear fruit, the planting of seed will need to happen first.

Jesus was told about some Greeks who had come to the Passover and wanted to see Him. Jesus answered that planting needed to be done in order to have a harvest, but His thoughts were not one grains such as corn, soybeans, or even wheat, thought He used wheat as an illustration. Jesus was thinking of a coming harvest of souls.

**“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”**

Whenever I hear these words, I think about being in a cemetery when the remains of a Christian are about to be laid to rest in the ground. When the mourners and pastor get to the gravesite, a prayer is said and then this passage from John 12 is often read as the first Scripture of the committal service.

In last Sunday’s John 11 Gospel of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus explained how He was going to **glorify** His heavenly Father and how He was going to be **glorified**: by His crucifixion, death, and resurrection. From that same text we get another funeral liturgy text, Jesus’ words to Martha. **“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die”** (11:25-26).

During the first Holy Week, the hour had come for Jesus, the Son of Man, to be glorified on the cross. Even if His disciples refused to accept His cross as glorious, Jesus knew what He was facing. Jesus compared Himself to a grain of wheat seed being planted, germinating (**dying**), growing and maturing to bear fruit, a crop for harvest. He was the first **grain of wheat to fall into the earth and die**, to die on the cross and be buried in the tomb, that is, **be glorified**.

The first fruit this would bear would be His resurrection from the dead, but not the last fruit. Just like a single wheat seed that is planted bears much fruit when it grows, Jesus died alone but rose to raise many from the dead with Him. Through our baptism into Christ, Christians follow Jesus from death to life. We die to sin with Him in baptism and rise to the new life as Christians following Him in faith.

Following Jesus in this life is a struggle for us because we are still sinners. The **“ruler of this world,”** as Jesus described the devil, was cast out of heaven as a fallen angel but can still tempt us. That poisonous serpent has been defanged by the cross of Jesus, his head crushed under Christ’s heel, but his deadly poison of sin and death already courses through our veins and will kill our bodies eventually. We look forward to the day when the devil will also be cast out of this world. Until then, being faithful will remain a struggle for us.

At the end of the Passion Gospel, John noted that **many even of the authorities believed in [Jesus], but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.** It is often easier to serve ourselves than Jesus. We are tempted to think that we can live like the unbelieving world and still be Christians.

When our flesh covets what we know is sinful and harmful to us, we cave to the immediate pleasure we desire, often without a second thought or pause to pray for strength to resist the temptation. When faced with decisions about what we should do or say, we are afraid to shun the glory of acceptance by friends and family, so we don’t speak up for what is right and faithful to God. We need to repent.

When Christians do speak God’s word clearly to a world that does not want to hear it, the world becomes increasingly intolerant.

An example of this just happened in Finland, at one time a Lutheran nation. Several years ago, two faithful Lutherans, one a medical doctor and an elected member of their parliament, and the other the head pastor of the small, independent Lutheran church in fellowship with the Missouri Synod, were convicted in court of hate speech for publishing a pamphlet on the biblical view of marriage between a man and a woman. Twice they appealed the conviction and were acquitted unanimously. But the government prosecutor took the case to the Finnish supreme court, which just found them guilty of hate speech, fined them a month’s pay each, and ordered them to remove all evidence of what they had published. There is one more place to appeal their case, to a European Union court, but that is not promising.

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The Palm Sunday crowd that cheered Jesus into Jerusalem sang, **“Hosanna/Save us we pray, O LORD,”** but Jesus was not coming to save them from an oppressive government. Jesus was coming to save them from their true enemies: sin, death, and the devil. This salvation could be theirs only if Jesus chose the glory of the cross that comes from God, which He did.

I think we can underestimate how hard this was for Jesus. It was not easy for Jesus to “in lowly pomp ride on to die” (*LSB* 441:2, 5). When speaking of His approaching sacrifice on the cross, Jesus said to His disciples, **“Now is My soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’?”** Jesus admitted to His disciples later in the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest: **“My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; watch and pray with Me”** (*Mt* 26:38).

When we are facing the same temptation to avoid the cross, we need to pray with Jesus to our Father in heaven; we need the support of our brothers and sisters in Christ as they pray with us and for us. Jesus’ disciples failed Him that night, but Jesus will never fail us when we ask Him to pray with us. What should we pray when tempted?  
**“Hosanna/Save us, we pray, O LORD!”**

It is no accident that the Church sings “Holy, holy, holy” to the Triune God and “Hosanna in the highest” to the One “who comes in the name of the Lord” whenever we are preparing to receive the Lord’s Supper. The One who came into this world as true man, who comes to us spiritually in His Word, also comes to save by giving us His true body and blood to eat and to drink in the Sacrament.

“Hosanna” is our prayer; save us now, we pray to Jesus, and He does. Amen.