

## Reflection for Palm Sunday: Hosanna! ([Mark 11:1-11](#))



Picture the noise and jubilation in the streets of Jerusalem. The oppressed people in this occupied city are desperately waiting for their Messiah. The Jews were well-versed in their scriptures. They knew that their Messiah, their Anointed One who would rescue them from Roman rule would not be coming on a fiery steed.

The prophet Zechariah put it thus:

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!  
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!  
See, your king comes to you,  
righteous and victorious,  
lowly and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
(Zechariah 9:9)

So here, entering Jerusalem, is a man whose reputation has spread throughout Judea; a man who has released people from the captivity of illness, disgrace, death; a man who has stood up to the Jewish leaders and told them of the need to change their hearts and not get trapped in legalism. He enters on a donkey colt, exactly as the prophet had foretold. The people are jubilant; the wave of excitement and anticipation is overwhelming. Here is their liberator, their King! They call out, "Hosanna!"

The exuberant crowd have become caught up in thinking that Jesus will be their liberator. And we know that this same crowd will go on to bay for Jesus to be handed over to be crucified in just a short space of time. What is happening here? Is this just an example of the fickleness of human nature and the beginning of the unfolding tragedy of Jesus death on the cross?

As is always the case with Jesus, there is a more profound meaning. Whilst it is undeniable that we observe a group mentality at work which can whip a crowd up to cheer for a man in one week and send him to his death the next, that word "Hosanna!" points to something else.

We think of this exclamation as a cry of praise, of confidence in God as Saviour, but this language of praise which we see used in the Psalms is more of a plea – "Save us now!" Help! It suggests that the person calling out is putting all their confidence in God because they need him to rescue them, a cry of trusting dependence.

Jesus wanted to save these people – he loved them! The very name of Jesus means, “God saves.” But did the crowds that gathered *really* want to be saved? Their idea of salvation was not the same as his. He wanted to change their hearts, to see them accept him as Lord. That was not the sort of revolution they had in mind.

What is striking here is Jesus’ “otherness”. He goes to the temple late in the day, and, not seeking to court the praise or favour of the crowd, he withdraws to Bethany, a couple of miles away from the big city, to be with his closest friends. The journey to his suffering on the cross is under way.

Where are we in this story? Do we treat God’s saving love with the air of presumption which the crowds showed when they threw down branches and cloaks along the way? What does that word “Hosanna” mean for you? As we journey through Holy Week towards Easter Sunday, let’s take the time to draw aside and look with fresh eyes at this staggering love story.

### **The Collect for Palm Sunday**

True and humble king, hailed by the crowd as Messiah:  
grant us the faith to know you and love you,  
that we may be found beside you  
on the way of the cross,  
which is the path of glory. **Amen.**

**Revd Vicky Barrett**