

Psalm 118:25-26

Dear Friends in Christ,

At first this seems like a strange text for a Maundy Thursday sermon. It doesn't seem to have anything to do with the events of Maundy Thursday or with the Lord's Supper. But there is a connection.

Do you remember how the Passion History reading that talks about the events that occurred in the upper room ends? It says, "After they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." These words were what they sang. Psalm 118 was the last Psalm in a group of Psalms that were called the Passover or Egyptian Hallel. The Hallel started with Psalms 113 and 114 which were sung before the Passover meal was eaten. Psalms 116, 117 and 118 were sung after the meal. So, these were some of the words that Jesus and his disciples sang on the first Maundy Thursday, after Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper.

If we use a slightly different translation of verse 25 you might recognize another connection with the Lord's Supper. A literal translation of the verse would be "O Lord, Hosanna." "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." That's what the people sang as Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday—words that they knew by heart because they would sing them every year at the Passover and at some of the other great Jewish festivals. But, they are also words that we sing almost every time we gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper. In the old liturgy we sing "Hosanna, Hosanna. Blessed is he. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." In a newer liturgy tonight we will sing, "*Hosanna! Come and save us, Lord God of hosts on high, and in your grace and mercy receive our fervent cry. Hosanna in the highest! How truly blest is he Who in God's name is coming To set his people free! He comes to bring salvation And with his blood outpoured, Deliver us from bondage— Hosanna, mighty Lord!*"

It is fitting that tonight, as we think about the institution of the Lord's Supper; as we prepare to receive what Jesus has given us; that we pray "Hosanna, O Lord, save us!"

The Passover reminded the disciples, and it reminds us, that Israel was in bondage in Egypt. They were in desperate straits. The Pharaoh who knew not Joseph had enslaved them and was forcing them to make bricks for his building projects. He had given the order that the midwives were to kill any male babies who were born to the Jews. Israel realized that there was nothing they could do to escape the cruel bondage of Pharaoh. They cried out to the Lord, "O Lord, save us."

We often see the bondage of Israel in Egypt as a picture of our bondage. But our bondage is even worse. Our evil task master is not some mortal, earthly ruler we can see, but Satan himself. Because of our sin, both what we inherit from Adam and Eve and the sins we ourselves have committed, we are hopelessly lost. We are facing the prospect of being slaves to Satan forever. We are facing the prospect of spending all eternity in the fires prepared for the Devil and his angels. There is nothing we can do to change our situation. We cannot escape our bondage to Sin and Satan by our own power.

This is a fact that we are to confess if we are going to receive the Lord's Supper properly. In preparation for the Lord's Supper we are to repent. We are to compare our thoughts, words and actions with God's will and confess the sins we discover as we do this. We are to admit that even without those sins we would deserve to have God punish us for all eternity in Hell.

We are to acknowledge that we are in bondage to sin and Satan. When we see what dire straits we are in, like Israel, we cry out, “Hosanna. O Lord, save us!”

As Jesus left the upper room on Maundy Thursday we know what he was about to do. He was going to the Garden to pray. But, not just to pray. He knew what Judas had been up to. He knew that he would be arrested and tried. He knew how it would all end up—with his death on the cross on Friday. In fact, he knew all these things on Palm Sunday as he rode into Jerusalem on the donkey to the shouts of “Hosanna” and “blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

What those people had in mind, what they imagined Jesus was going to do to save them, was totally off the mark. But truer words were never spoken. Jesus was the one who came in the name of the Lord. He was the one who had come to save them; not from an enslaving Pharaoh; not from the conquering Romans; but from sin and Satan. He had come in the name of the Lord not just to save them, but to save all people of all time.

Blessed is He. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. He is the God-Man. He is the Messiah. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one who came to be **pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. By his wounds we are healed.**

What a wonderful God we have that he would sacrifice himself to save us! But, since that sacrifice was once for all time; since it never needs to be repeated again; why do we still sing these ancient words?

True, they remind us that Jesus came to earth, rode into Jerusalem, suffered and died in our place and rose again on the third day to be our savior. But, there’s more. As Jesus celebrated the Passover and was about to fulfill it, to be the lamb whose blood allows God to Passover us and not punish us for our sins, he gave his disciples and us a replacement for the Passover, a new covenant. He took a piece of the unleavened bread that was used in the Passover meal and he said, **take and eat, this is my body.** Then he took a cup of wine that was used in the Passover celebration and he said, **drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.** The Apostle Paul asks, **is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?** The answer? Of course it is!

We weren’t there when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, but Jesus still comes to us. In a way that is a miracle, beyond our understanding, he gives us the very body that was nailed to the cross in our place and the very blood what was shed as payment for our sins. In, with and under the bread and the wine in the Lord’s Supper he comes to us and in a personal way, one-on-one, he says “here I am, I have come in the name of the Lord, I’m your savior, your sins are forgiven!”

As we gather here tonight we join the psalmist and the Israelites and all who understand that they are enslaved by sin and we sing “Hosanna! O Lord, Save us!” And like the Israelites at the first Passover, no even more so than the Israelites, we are filled with joy and thankfulness, for we know the one who came in the name of the Lord to save us. In a miraculous way he comes to us in bread and wine and assures us that all our sins are forgiven and we have been set free from bondage, and so we sing “Blessed is he, Blessed is he, who comes in the name of the Lord,” and blessed are all who come to the house of the Lord to receive him.