

*“For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free. Then he will say, ‘Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you; let them be your protection!’ ‘‘See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.’”*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Another Palm Sunday, and those words of praise from Scripture that opened our worship today resound in our ears: ***“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”*** (John 12:13, ESV) I don’t think we can think of Palm Sunday without joining our hosannas with those of the crowds on the road to Jerusalem that day. We, too, want to sing our praises to the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Of course, we know what the events of this day will lead to during the coming week. We look back knowing that the Lord of life and salvation came to Jerusalem to give His life for us all, that we may be forgiven. We know we are also just one week away from remembering and celebrating the joyous good news that we celebrate every Sunday; the good news that our dying Saviour rose again from the dead, that we may have life in Him.

The two words from the Gospel of John that always jump out at me on this day are the word, “hosanna” and the word, “blessed”. While only Matthew, Mark and John mention the joyous cries of hosanna from the crowds, all four gospels note that the people that day quoted the words of Psalm 118: ***“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.”*** (Psalm 118:26, ESV) Those two words are important for this day. It is always good to remember that the word, “hosanna” means, “save us, we pray”. That is exactly why the Son of God comes to Jerusalem—to save His people. As Jesus says in our Gospel reading today: ***“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.”*** (John 12:27, ESV) We cry, ‘hosanna!’ Save us! Christ comes to do just that.

And then there is that word “blessed”. We sometimes feel confused by what this word means. The Greek word for ‘blessed’ is εὐλογέω. It is the basis of our English word, “eulogy”. In Hebrew it is *barek*. Whether Greek or Hebrew, that word is used in two different ways. It can mean “to give the gift and ability for success” when it is bestowed by the greater person to the lesser. Scripture declares that ***“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”*** (Genesis 1:27, ESV) Then the very next thing we hear is ***“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”*** (Genesis 1:28, ESV) The greater (God) gave the power and strength that was necessary for Adam and Eve (the lesser) to be able to do what God commanded them.

But today we hear that word from the lesser to the greater—from the people who lined the roadway, waving their palm branches, who praise the greater—the Saviour of the world. When we join in the words of the psalmist and say, ***“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!”*** (Psalm 103:1, ESV) we are giving praise to God. We, the lesser, acknowledge the glory of the greater, of God. When we leave this place, we will go with the words that God commanded be given to His people: ***“Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. ‘So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.’”*** (Numbers 6:23-27, ESV) We will have the greater speak to grant gifts to us, the lesser, for our lives.

As I said, those two words—hosanna and blessed—are important words today. Yet perhaps you’ve already noticed that neither one of them is used in our text today! In fact, our text today may seem a bit out of place for this Palm Sunday. Would it not make more sense to look at the words of the prophet Zechariah, who is able to paint a vivid picture of this day by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as he tells us: ***“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*** (Zechariah 9:9, ESV) At least Zechariah gets the idea of praise for this day. We see God’s blessings as the King of kings come to us, in that humble spirit which Paul speaks of in our Epistle lesson today.

So, where's the blessing in our text? Where's the praise? Our text today comes from Moses' last words to the people of Israel. They are standing on the brink of the promised land. After the years of bondage and after the years of wandering in the wilderness because of their stubbornness and unbelief, they will soon go in to take possession of the land that God had sworn to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as their inheritance. As they prepare for these days, Moses speaks—or sings, since this is known as the song of Moses—to declare the greatness of God, but also to speak of the ways in which the people are going to be tempted to fall away. Moses knew from his personal experience with the people and as a sinner himself just how quickly people forget the God who has blessed His people in so many wonderful ways. Moses speaks of God, saying: ***“The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.”*** (Deuteronomy 32:4, ESV) But in the very next breath he says of the people: ***“They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation. Do you thus repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?”*** (Deuteronomy 32:5–6, ESV)

Moses doesn't pull any punches. He reminds the people that even though God had chosen them, they decided to chase after gods that are no gods. The history of Israel shows just how often they repeated this sin over the years. God points out the foolishness of what they have done: ***Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you; let them be your protection!*** God ridicules those gods who are no gods, who cannot rise up to help and save the people. But before we condemn those people, we have to ask ourselves, “How often have we done the exact same thing?” Our idols may not be crafted out of wood and stone, but we worship things that really are powerless to help us. Luther rightly said: *Now, I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god.* (LC, 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment) God, forgive us for those times we have not loved you with all our heart, soul, mind and strength! Keep us from chasing after things that cannot help and cannot satisfy the true needs and desires of our hearts.

But remember that we want to focus on our hosannas of praise and the One who is the source of every blessing. Even though we have not deserved the least goodness from our God, He comes to bring blessing to His people. Our text says: ***“For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free.”*** Instead of coming to judge and condemn, God comes in compassion and mercy. He comes to set things right. He comes this day on that donkey as the humble deliverer. Again, He comes in answer to the prayer of ‘hosanna’—save us, we pray. Paul tells us that Christ ***“emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”*** (Philippians 2:7–8, ESV) He did that for helpless, worthless sinners like you and me. He did it for the people who chase after gods that are powerless to help or save them. He did what He didn't have to do. He came to save us.

My dear people, loved by God, if that doesn't declare that we are blessed, indeed, then I don't know what will! The true God says, ***“See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.”*** God has the right and the power to wound and to kill, yet He chose to be merciful and to make alive. To do this the demands of the law still had to be met. We are blessed because those demands of the law are met in Christ, who is wounded and killed on that cross so that we can be healed, so that we can be made alive. We have the assurance that the law cannot condemn us when we cling to the Saviour, for He rose again from the dead. Those hands which were pierced by the nails are the hands of the living Lord who holds us in His loving embrace. Nothing can take us from those loving hands.

Maybe the words, “hosanna” and “blessed” are not in our text, but there is no denying that God has answered our hosanna and has saved us. The greater has definitely come to bestow on us the gifts that lead us to life in its fullness. As Moses said: ***“For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants”***. What greater blessings can there be than this? Blessed, indeed, we join with the hymn writer who said: *Then sing your hosannas and raise your glad voice; Proclaim the blest tidings that all may rejoice. Laud, honor, and praise to the Lamb that was slain: With Father and Spirit He ever shall reign.* (LSB 480, st. 5) Amen.