

# Garlands of Hosannas

Rev. Jeanne Murawski

April 17, 2011

Hosanna!

It's such a weird word, isn't it?

It's a church word, to be sure. We don't use it anywhere else. It's not like we walk down the street and shout it in greeting to our friends and neighbors. *Hosanna, Fred! Hosanna, Jim! How're the wife and kids?*

We don't hear it on TV, or in the news. *As the crowd gathered in Washington, the cries of Hosanna could be heard on the national mall.*

No, Hosanna is a word we use in worship, and even then, it might not make too much sense.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the Highest, the communion liturgy reads.

Hosanna, the crowd shouts in our gospel reading for today, Matthew's story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem.

Hosanna, our kids shout, as they wave their branches, then head to faith circuit, leaving us with smiles on our faces, and palms in our hands or next to us in the pews.

Hosanna indeed. But what does it all mean?

Standing here on the edge of Holy week, toward the end of Lent, I am reminded of how we began this season of the church year. On the first Sunday of lent, we shared in women's worship here in the sanctuary, and heard reflections based on Psalm 32.

I'll remind you of that text...

*Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

*Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

*While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.*

*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

*Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*

*Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.*

*You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.*

*I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*

*Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.*

*Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.*

*Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.*

As I told the women on retreat on Friday, this text has been haunting my own personal Lenten devotions. I've returned to it again and again over the last 40 days, diving deeply into the lines of poetry attributed to David.

I've been especially focused on verse 7:

You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

God as a hiding place.

As it is rewritten in the message paraphrase bible:

God's my island hideaway, keeps danger far from the shore, throws garlands of hosannas around my neck.

An island hideaway, where garlands of hosannas are thrown around our necks. It sounds so peaceful.

Hosanna is one of those words that has taken on different meanings over time. It originally was a cry for help. "Save, we pray" is a more or less direct translation. Hosanna - Save us.

At the same time, Hosanna is a celebratory word, a term of praise, recognizing that salvation has already come. Hosanna - praise God!

God throws garlands of hosannas around my neck.

Psalm 32 tells us that God is there for us, seeking our repentance, offering us love and grace, no matter what we may be going through, or how we might be suffering for the guilt of what we have done.

In that Psalm, the hosanna is a response to repentance, a cry of deliverance, and a shout of joy.

In the Gospel reading, Hosanna is a request.

Save us, they shout. Praise God for what you will do for us.

The people believe that Jesus has come to Jerusalem to conquer for them. To take on their troubles and make them go away. They believed they were welcoming their salvation, and they were, just not in ways they expected. And too often we approach God in the same way.

We want God to make our troubles to disappear, to evaporate like the morning dew.

So many of us are going through difficult times right now. I imagine I'm not the only one to whom a God who offers safe harbor sounds really good. God as a place where we are protected, God as the one who gives us rest.

There are so many things we might want to hide away from. The stress of caring for an aging parent. The aching depression that just won't go away. A worrisome work situation, leaving you drained and spent each weekday. Children that need you constantly. Health problems, relationship difficulties, financial woes, family dynamics that grate. Doubt. Fear. Pain.

These are real issues, and the pain they cause is real.

But we have been given an island hideaway, a place to be reminded once more who we are, and whose we are - we belong to God. Cast your anxieties on God, because he cares for you, we read in 1 Peter 5:7. Not don't worry, or don't have anxiety, but share your worries and anxieties with God, because God cares about your life. God cares for you.

Turn to God and be reminded that you are more than your life situation. You are more than you can even imagine.

While God offers a hiding place in times of trial, the other side of the coin is that place is not a place to live, with everything fixed for us, forgetting the cares of the world. Rather, we are assured, reassured, strengthened, and sent back out to face our lives with new assurance that we do not walk these trials alone.

God won't make the bad things or hard times disappear from our lives. But in God, we find strength and assurance that we can make it through, because we belong to God.

The season of lent has been a time to turn inward, to seek that spark of the spirit that resides within, helping us to see God's presence in our lives through the joy and the pain of living.

As we move out of lent in the week ahead, we will remember together the events of holy week. Jesus' gathering with his disciples for a final meal, conversation, and a new commandment. The betrayal. The arrest. The trial and the death on a cross.

And we will be reminded on Easter morning that death is not the final word. The reality of resurrection is that good triumphs over evil, that a new beginning is always possible.

Hosanna is a church word. But maybe hosanna can become a word we use in our life as well. Not as a greeting to a friend, or a shout in the street, but something we say in our prayers to God.

Save us we pray, Dear God. Praise you for what you will do in our world and in our lives. Hosanna. Amen.