



## Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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### “Hosanna”

Psalm 118, Mark 11:1-10

Palm Sunday, March 25, 2018

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I recently asked a group of Broadstreeters to share their favorite parade. Their answers included:

- The Tournament of Roses Parade
- Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade
- The Doo-Dah Parade here in Columbus
- Inaugural parades
- Any St. Patrick’s Day parade

It’s hard not to like a certain kind of parade. I’m thinking of small town Fourth of July parades, with high school bands, the mayor in a convertible, maybe even some Shriners in little cars. There are other kinds of parades that aren’t so charming. Northern Ireland has something called the marching season. It happens every year. It begins on Easter and ends July 12. Why July 12? That is the day that Protestant William of Orange attained victory over Catholic James II in the Battle of the Boyne. When did this happen? 1690. These parades have been happening for a long time. They are rooted in something old and ugly. The majority of the thousands of parades that take place during marching season consist of Protestant organizations marching through Catholic neighborhoods. In other words, these parades are about intimidation and control. The threat of violence is always in the air.

And then there is the Perfect Season Parade that was held on January 6, 2018. Three thousand or so football fans participated. There were floats, a band, many hand-made signs. It was quite an event despite the single-digit temperatures. I should tell you this parade took place in Cleveland in celebration of the Brown’s perfect 0-16 record. That’s sixteen losses and not a single win. Some of the signs held up that day were poignant: “They Tried,” “There’s Always Next Year.” Two men marched together. The man on the left held a sign saying, “I’m with Stupid” pointing to a man holding a sign reading “Season Ticket Holder.” My favorite sign read, “Hey, LeBron, Can You Play Quarterback?”

There are all kinds of parades held for all kinds of reasons. I confess that I’ve never known what to do with the Palm Sunday parade. The event is recorded in all four gospels and they tell a similar story. Jesus, on a donkey, rides into Jerusalem. Crowds line the parade route cheering him on. But what does it mean exactly? Is it a moment of triumph for Jesus and his way of living? Is it political irony, a contrast to the military parades of the day?

The key, I believe, is to be found in the word shouted by the crowd as Jesus goes by. “Hosanna,” they cry out. It literally means, “we beseech you to deliver us.” Or put more succinctly, “Save us.” The people that day are calling out, “Save us.” I’m thinking that the meaning of Palm Sunday hangs on those two words.

That day in Jerusalem, what do the crowds need to be saved from? If asked, they probably wouldn’t answer “save us from hell” or “save us from a life without God.” They would be more specific, more immediate. “Save

More sermons can be found online at <http://bspsc.org/AboutUs/SundayMorning/Sermons.aspx>

us from the Romans, save us from the daily humiliations faced by occupied people. Save us from the Romans,” they would say.

Presbyterian pastor Scott Black Johnston has written a sermon on this text that I am borrowing from this morning. He tells of a class he taught with the seventh graders of his church. They were talking about salvation and he asked them that same question: “What do you need to be saved from?” He encouraged them not give him the answer they thought he wanted to hear.

One of the youth raised her hand and said, “Death.” Another fellow offered that God could really help him out by saving him from an upcoming math test. Then one of the seventh graders said, “Pressure.” And another youth said, “My parents’ expectations.” Then another shy individual, almost in a whisper said, “Fear. I want God to save me from my fears.”<sup>1</sup>

Those are good answers. Honest answers that got me thinking about who the Palm Sunday parade is for this year. Who is lining the parade route in 2018 calling out, “Save us. Save us.”?

- Parents and student of Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School. “Save us from grief and fear,” they cry out.
- The students and their supporters who marched yesterday in Washington, in Columbus, across the country. “Save us from gun violence,” they cry out.
- Those battling addiction. “Save us from stigma. Save us from death,” they cry out.
- More than 65 million people who are currently displaced from their homes. That is almost one in every 100 human beings. If refugees and internally displaced people were a nation, they would be the 21st biggest on earth. They come from places like Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Nigeria, Columbia, Afghanistan, Myanmar.<sup>2</sup> More than 65 million lining the Palm Sunday parade route calling out “Save us from war, save us from the squalor and disease and hopelessness of refugee camps. Save us.”

How about you? What do you want to be saved from? How do you honestly answer that question? I’ve thought of a few possible answers.

- Save me from anger.
- Save me from depression.
- Save me from debt.
- Save me from the strife in my family.
- Save me from bitterness.
- Save me from ambition.
- Save me from cancer.
- Save me from loneliness.

Save us, Lord, save us from our fears. God, take our broken places and make them whole. Jump into the water and drag our almost-drowned selves to shore. Can you hear the chorus of voices? “Save us, Lord. Save us.”

It’s a lot, isn’t it. A lot to put on one guy riding a donkey.

Can he deliver? Put another way, does God do anything to save us? Yes, I would answer but I’m not sure I can give you too many specifics. If you want to know how God saves, look at this week. This holy week. This journey from Maundy Thursday through Good Friday and finally to Easter.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://day1.org/1240-save\\_us](http://day1.org/1240-save_us)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/01/18-refugees-18-countries-and-their-hopes-for-2018>

I have to warn you. It may not feel like salvation. Think of the crowd that day. The salvation they are looking for is primarily freedom from the Romans. Jesus does not take up a sword and send the Romans packing. Instead, he shares a meal with his friends, he prays in a garden, he allows himself to be arrested. And, when it becomes apparent that Jesus can't save the people in a manner they recognize, they turn on him. "Hosanna" becomes "Crucify him." They look at Jesus' actions and conclude that this doesn't look much like salvation.<sup>3</sup>

I think being saved by God has something to do with God being with us, with God's willingness to wade into the messiest, most broken parts of our lives. This God shows up. Sometimes through us.

God shows up through us when we listen. When we pay attention to one another. When we show up for one another. When we go to the funeral.

Deirdre Sullivan is a lawyer who several years ago wrote an essay entitled "Always Go to the Funeral." She writes,

I believe in always going to the funeral. My father taught me that. The first time he said it directly to me, I was 16 and trying to get out of going to calling hours for Miss Emerson, my old fifth grade math teacher. I did not want to go. My father was unequivocal. "Dee," he said, "you're going. Always go to the funeral. Do it for the family."

So my dad waited outside while I went in. It was worse than I thought it would be: I was the only kid there. When the condolence line deposited me in front of Miss Emerson's shell-shocked parents, I stammered out, "Sorry about all this," and stalked away. But, for that deeply weird expression of sympathy delivered 20 years ago, Miss Emerson's mother still remembers my name and always says hello with tearing eyes.

That was the first time I went un-chaperoned, but my parents had been taking us kids to funerals and calling hours as a matter of course for years. By the time I was 16, I had been to five or six funerals. I remember two things from the funeral circuit: bottomless dishes of free mints and my father saying on the ride home, "...Always go to the funeral."

Sullivan continues:

Sounds simple—when someone dies, get in your car and go to calling hours or the funeral. That, I can do. But I think a personal philosophy of going to funerals means more than that. "Always go to the funeral" means that I have to do the right thing when I really, really don't feel like it. I have to remind myself of it when I could make some small gesture, but I don't really have to and I definitely don't want to. I'm talking about those things that represent only inconvenience to me, but the world to the other guy... In my humdrum life, the daily battle hasn't been good versus evil. It's hardly so epic. Most days, my real battle is doing good versus doing nothing.

In going to funerals, I've come to believe that while I wait to make a grand heroic gesture, I should just stick to the small inconveniences that let me share in life's inevitable, occasional calamity.

Sullivan concludes:

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<sup>3</sup> [http://day1.org/1240-save\\_us](http://day1.org/1240-save_us)

On a cold April night three years ago, my father died a quiet death from cancer. His funeral was on a Wednesday, middle of the workweek. I had been numb for days when, for some reason, during the funeral, I turned and looked back at the folks in the church. The memory of it still takes my breath away. The most human, powerful and humbling thing I've ever seen was a church at 3:00 on a Wednesday full of inconvenienced people who believe in going to the funeral.<sup>4</sup>

May we be such people. Because when we show up for one another in such a specific way we are participating in God's best work. I believe that this is, in part, how God saves us. God comes. God shows up. God steps out of grandeur to stand with us in awkward places at awful times to experience life and death with us.<sup>5</sup> For us, sometime through us, God answers our cries of "Hosanna."

So we begin this holy week with palms in our hands and "Hosannas" on our lips. Save us, Lord. Save us all.

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2005/08/08/4785079/always-go-to-the-funeral>

<sup>5</sup> [http://day1.org/1240-save\\_us](http://day1.org/1240-save_us)