

Hosanna! The one who comes in the name of the Lord! **Mark 11:1-11**

Good morning church! Again, welcome to the church, your spiritual home this morning. I am so glad to see you. Since last November, Asbury had gathered virtually due to increasing numbers of Covid-19 cases in our state. But now, we have reopened our sanctuary. It's my joy to see you face to face. To see you clearly, I'm wearing my first eyeglasses. Again, good to see you all!

I think reopening our sanctuary on Palm Sunday is very meaningful. When we are excited and joyful, what do we do? We shout "Hooray!" After four months of closure, we are finally able to gather at the church. How do you feel? "Hooray!" Our exultant feeling may be similar to the people, shouting "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" The word 'hosanna' has several meanings, but it is often used as an expression of jubilation. So the Contemporary English Bible translates Hosanna to Hooray! If you are joyful being in our beautiful sanctuary today, say... "Hosanna!" or "Hooray!"

Empire Silence people with power!

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, people were so excited and shouted "Hosanna!" It was the season of Passover. Passover was a festival to remember and celebrate God's mighty act of salvation from Egypt. It's like the Gaspee Days in Rhode Island. What do we do on Gaspee Days? Of course, we eat. We may eat clam cakes, Rhode Island Clam Chowder, pizza strips with DEL'S LEMONADE while we enjoy watching the Gaspee Day parade. Right? But we also remember and celebrate the brave colonist from Rhode Island who burned the British ship, the Gaspee. This is an important celebration because this incident was the first violent uprising against the British Empire and eventually led to the American Revolution. So we become a little bit more patriotic at this time of festival. Right? Similarly, a patriotic fervor rose up in the people during the festival of Passover as the Israelites remembered and celebrated their history of liberation from Egypt by God.

This meant that the Passover was a dangerous time for the Roman Empire because there could be civil unrest and violent uprising against the empire. To quench this dangerous nationalistic spirit, the Roman empire deployed Roman troops to Jerusalem. Let me share a short video clip from the movie "Ben-Hur." It helps us understand how the Israelites might have felt seeing Roman soldiers marching into their holy city. [ppt 1:14] How would people in Jerusalem feel as they watched Roman troops marching? Intimidated, fearful, humiliated, and perhaps angry. But the presence of Roman troops silenced people. This is how the empire worked and maintained peace.

You may know the term, "the Pax Romana" which means Roman Peace. The Pax Romana refers to a roughly 200-year-long time period from 27 BCE to 180 CE. It was considered the golden age of the Roman Empire, a time of prosperity, stability and peace. However, the Roman peace was built upon the tears and blood of colonized people. The Roman peace benefitted only a few of the people while the empire muted the cries of people by presenting its magnificent military and economic powers.

We are still living in the empire. Perhaps, the most powerful empire in history. Rebecca Gordon, a columnist for the magazine, The Nation, wrote, "With unprecedented economic inequality and massive overspending on military expansion, America now looks a lot like 476

CE Rome.”¹ The U.S. stock market reached an all time high on Feb 17, this year while income inequality in the U.S. is at its highest level in 50 years. We all saw how Black Lives Matter protesters were brutally silenced last year. In order to cover up their failed Covid-19 response, politicians called Covid-19 the ‘Chinese-virus’ or ‘Kung-flu’ and sowed seeds of Anti-Asian racism and we have witnessed the deadly consequences. Anti-Asian hate crimes are skyrocketing but still many people don’t want to face it and minimize or deny the reality of racism. In 2020, homelessness in the U.S. sharply increased and at the same time criminalization of homelessness. [ppt] Can you find any irony in these pictures? The advertisement on the bench says, “Homelessness kills” while the bench itself is anti-homeless architecture. Same is the true to another one. The rainbow color symbolizes inclusiveness but the bench excludes homeless people. Many cities employ anti-homeless architecture in order to prevent homeless people from being seen in the public. [ppt] A church put up a statue of homeless Jesus sleeping on a bench. Do you know what happened? within twenty minutes, a police officer called the church pastor because someone called to report a homeless man sleeping on a park bench.

The empire hid the dark side of things and wanted to show only the bright side of their regime. It silenced, made invisible and muted the marginalized people. There is no true peace. No joy. We are living in the empire and receiving some benefits from it, but we, Christians, should not believe that the empire brings peace or that the empire is our savior or protector.

Hooray!

Our savior is the only one. Jesus Christ! The peace Jesus brings to us is different from the peace the empire brings. Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem shows the difference. I will share another video clip with you. [ppt] Compared to the Roman soldiers marching into Jerusalem, Jesus’s entry to Jerusalem was less spectacular. Pontius Pilate rode a war horse and was surrounded by his royal guards with spears and shields. Jesus rode a colt, which is a symbol of peace. He was surrounded by the common people. Although we celebrate Jesus’ triumphal entry to Jerusalem today, honestly, Jesus’ entry to the holy city was less impressive than the Roman army marching in.

But Jesus’ somewhat unimpressive entry to Jerusalem created a splendid welcoming. When people in Jerusalem heard that Jesus was coming, they went to the gate to see Jesus. As Jesus entered, people gave him a grand welcome, throwing their coats and palm branches on the street. They were filled with joy and shouted “hooray! Our king is coming back!” Joyful shouts from the poor and the oppressed filled the air. This is a stark difference between Roman peace and the peace Jesus brought. The Roman peace brought jubilation only to the powerful but Jesus brought joyful and vibrant peace for many, especially, the marginalized and the neglected.

We need to think about if what we do and proclaim really bring peace and jubilation to the marginalized. A homeless man had regularly come to Zion KUMC. He didn’t know Korean but he usually showed up on Sunday mornings. I shared my English sermon manuscript with him but most of the time, he didn’t seem very interested in hearing my sermon and often fell asleep during my preaching. One day, I went to the church for work and at lunch time, I wanted to eat a hamburger, my favorite America food. So I grab a bacon cheeseburger combo at Wendy’s. On my way back home, I happened to see him walking on the street and stopped the car to talk with him. As we talked I realized that he hadn’t had a proper meal for days, so I gave him my lunch bag and said ‘goodbye.’ Through the rearview mirror, I saw him, shouting “hooray!” My sermon made him sleep but my cheeseburger made him shout for joy.

¹ <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/american-empire-decline/>

Good words alone do not bring peace and joy. Also, “It takes more than bread to stay alive. It takes a steady stream of words from God’s mouth.” (Matthew 4:4) Both words and actions are necessary to bring peace and joy. Sometimes, our kind words can bring peace and joy. Sometimes, our small act of serving and sharing a meal with someone in need brings peace and jubilation. Sometimes, simply standing with people of color who protest against racism can bring peace and shouts of joy, “Hosanna!”

Save us

Of course, we cannot solve all social problems. In fact, we are not the savior but Jesus Christ. We are people, shouting “Hosanna!” Hosanna is an expression of joy and celebration but it also has another meaning. “Hosanna” also translates as “Save us” or “Save us now.” So the crowd in the Bible was shouting “save us!” They believed that Jesus could save them. When they shouted ‘hosanna,’ they believed Jesus was the messiah who brings peace.

It’s the same for us. When we lift our palms and wave them this morning, we declare our allegiance to Jesus Christ and trust him as our savior. Lift your palms and wave them, saying “Hosanna. Save us now!” Our savior is Jesus Christ. Trusting Jesus Christ does not mean that we do nothing and merely wait for Jesus to solve our problems. Rather, it means that we continue to do the work of mercy such as feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned. We may feel helpless and hopeless while doing these works. But if we have faith in our savior, we will not lose hope. As Martin Luther Jr. said “We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”

Jesus Christ, our Savior has come for our salvation. The Prince of Peace has come to our rescue. So let us shout with joy. Wave your palms and say, Hosanna! or Hooray! Let us share this joy and peace with people around us. Jesus Christ, our Savior, will bring peace to the world. Amen.