

Title: The Messiah We Are Looking For

Date: 3/24/2024 (Palm Sunday, Year B)

Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church

Service: 10 am Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)

Readings [Mark 11:1-11](#); [Isaiah 50:4-9a](#); [Philippians 2:5-11](#); [The Passion According to Mark](#); [Psalm 31:9-16](#)

Audio Link: <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/st-albans-austin/episodes/Palm-Sunday-The-Messiah-We-Are-Looking-For-e2hhro9>

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/FwO6smFoTHE?t=2196>

In the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Morning by morning [the Lord GOD] wakens--  
wakens my ear  
to listen as those who are taught.  
The Lord GOD has opened my ear,  
and I was not rebellious,  
I did not turn backward. (Isa 50:4-5)  
Amen.

One of my favorite things about Bible study on Wednesday mornings is that we read the passages assigned for the coming Sunday out of different versions of the Bible. Bill is ready to read the Psalm from the King James Version. Debbie often reads from the New Jerusalem Bible. Jack and Sue introduced us to the *First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament*.<sup>1</sup> And Randall often proclaims the gospel from a translation titled *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*.<sup>2</sup>

As I listen to them, I compare their version to my go-to translation, the NRSV- the NEW Revised Standard Version, which is what we use on Sunday mornings. This is not to be confused with the Revised Standard Edition OR the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. This is to say that there are SO MANY ways to read the Bible. And that's **before** we try to map these teachings onto the challenges of the present day. That's before we start translating the words on the page and the space between them into thoughts, words, and deeds.

It's remarkable that we agree on **anything** at all. It will always astonish me that some people insist that **theirs** is the one true, right, and proper way to read and apply Scripture. And people who read the Bible that way don't just see this as a rule of life for themselves; they want to impose those rules on other people, too. They do this to protect their family and to guarantee the stability of their society, their country. They do this for those poor unfortunate souls who can be saved if they just understand the Bible as they do, that they accept Jesus the Christ as savior the way they do.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowd shouts, "Hosanna!" Hosanna, similar to Alleluia, is a word we use a lot in worship. And sometimes we hear those words so often we forget what they mean, or we may not even think to ask what they mean.

Some versions of the Bible translate Hosanna as "Praise God!" Many scholars think that this might be a meaning it took on later, as people associated it with the saving grace of

God through Jesus. At the time Jesus entered Jerusalem, crying “Hosanna!” was probably less about offering praise and more about making a petition. They weren’t just cheering; they were asking for something.

The people yelling “Hosanna!” were likely saying to Jesus, “Deliver us! Save us now!”<sup>3</sup>

To put ourselves in their position, say that with me three times,  
“Deliver us! Save us now!”  
“Deliver us! Save us now!”  
“Deliver us! Save us now!”

The services of Holy Week are all about putting us into that time and place. They remind us of events that happened way back then so that we can pay attention to how this is also happening right now.

This is an extended version of what we do every Sunday. When we gather at the Holy Table, we don’t just reenact what happened at the Last Supper, we actively participate in it.<sup>4</sup> We recognize that the events of that night are STILL shaping our identity and self-understanding, children of God created in the image of God constantly tempted to deny Jesus as Peter did, to wander off the loving, life-giving and liberating path that Jesus laid out for us to follow.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout Holy Week, we remember the Passover, the Exodus. We remember that through Moses, God delivered God’s people out of Egypt, freed them from slavery to Pharaoh. We remember that through Jesus, God delivered God’s people from death and freed them from slavery to sin. Recalling what God has done for us, we trust that God will do it again. Reliving these stories in thought, word and deed overlays the past onto the present so that we may perceive where and how God is calling us into the future.

The procession of Jesus into Jerusalem was probably one of two processions into the Holy City around that time. Each year around Passover, the representative of the Roman Empire would’ve entered the city on a majestic horse, in front of a column of soldiers. This was a proactive demonstration of power, to crush any thought of rebellion before it has a chance of taking root in people’s hearts and minds.

As Father George Corrigan sums it up, “Jesus’s procession proclaimed the kingdom of God; Pilate’s proclaimed the power of empire... Pilate’s procession embodied the power, glory and violence of the empire that ruled the world. Jesus’ procession embodied an alternative vision, the Kingdom of God.”<sup>6</sup>

If I asked you which procession you’d join, Pilate’s or Jesus’, the imperial parade or the people’s protest that was a parody of the parade, who would say that sounds like a trick question?

After all, the people who spread their cloaks on the road or laid down the leafy branches they cut in the fields were also looking for a king and the coming of a kingdom. They

looked at Jesus, and they longed for the glory days when it felt like the people of Israel were in charge of their own destiny.

Those who went ahead of Jesus and those who followed him cried, “Save us!”, and they blessed the one who came in the name of the Lord. Then they blessed the “coming kingdom of our ancestor David.” This is a little bit like saying, “Save us! But on our terms.” “Deliver us! And here’s what we’d like you to do for us.”

This ignores the fact that things in the kingdom of David weren’t great for everybody, least of all David’s wives and daughters, even his own soldiers. He was flawed as any other human being with lots of power and lots of opportunities to abuse his power. This glosses over the possibility that life back then probably wasn’t as good as they imagined it to be. This forgets that the kingdom of David didn’t last very long in its form, which is probably a sign of the flaws in that system.

The people spreading their cloaks and leafy branches were probably thinking that no matter what, instead of the Romans telling them what to do, it would still be better to return to life in the good old days, when someone **like them** was in charge.

This is like when people say life was better “back then,” in the 1920’s, or 50’s or 60’s and so on. It might’ve been better, but not for everyone. This longing for the past ignores the divisions and entrenched inequalities that existed back then, the racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and so on. This not to say that we’ve solved these problems by now, but this invites us to think carefully about what we’re asking for, what we’re longing for.

Without fully realizing it, are we trying to make Jesus’ procession a little more like Pilate’s parade? There is probably more triumphal marching and pomp and circumstance on the road down the Mount of Olives today. If Jesus and his followers were watching the procession into Jerusalem today, I wonder if they would associate that more strongly with Pilate’s parade.

When we cry out for God to save us, to deliver us, what are we really hoping for? Are we truly praying that God’s will be done, God’s kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven? Or do we have some strongly worded suggestions for God about what we’d like to see?

Placing the processions next to each other isn’t just about choosing one over the other, it’s encouraging us to really pay attention. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he says, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Just as Jesus emptied himself and took human form, perhaps we can likewise let go of our expectations of what our life should look like, what we should be doing. There’s a difference between being right and being right with God, which looks like being in right relationship with ourselves and our neighbors and all of God’s creation and creatures. This is not about being saved from the fires of what some call hell, this is about wholeness and restoration for **all**, recognizing and calling forth the goodness of God within us and around us and between us.

Perhaps being saved starts with being vulnerable like the writer of Psalm 31, who does not hold back **at all** when he prays to God. Perhaps becoming whole starts with learning to hold the tension of having both faith and doubt, of feeling that the world is a broken pot and still putting our trust in God. It may feel like things are hopeless, that they will never get better, but just because we don't see how doesn't mean they won't.

Even as our strength fails because of affliction, and sorrow consumes our eyes and throat and belly, we put our fears and worries into the hands of God so that God's face may shine upon them, so that God can transform them with loving-kindness and love us into this interconnected wholeness.

This week is Holy Week. Something is holy when we set it aside for God. Going on retreat isn't the only way to set aside our time and lives for God.

This week, I invite you to set aside time to pray with as much vulnerability and thoroughness as the psalmists did. Nothing is off the table; there is no need to present a front. Allow yourself to lament and descend to the depths of grief. Jesus is waiting there, for you.

This week, I invite you to pray for the same mind that was in Christ Jesus to be in us. As we go about our lives, let us empty ourselves of preconceptions and expectations so we can listen for what people are *really* saying and ask questions with curiosity and without judgment.

This week, I invite us to ask:

What are we actually looking for in a Messiah?

Whose restoration and wholeness do we envision in the Kingdom of God, and what does that look and sound like?

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<sup>1</sup> [https://bookshop.org/p/books/first-nations-version-an-indigenous-translation-of-the-new-testament-terry-m-wildman/15905869?ean=9780830813506&gad\\_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwwYSwBhDcARIsAOyL0fj3WBbTi9aXKfMtuRFioxEzrOfZ4xq8HXh4\\_ANyRnfXVyWYVf-tlYaAk4QEALw\\_wcB](https://bookshop.org/p/books/first-nations-version-an-indigenous-translation-of-the-new-testament-terry-m-wildman/15905869?ean=9780830813506&gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwwYSwBhDcARIsAOyL0fj3WBbTi9aXKfMtuRFioxEzrOfZ4xq8HXh4_ANyRnfXVyWYVf-tlYaAk4QEALw_wcB)

<sup>2</sup> <https://bookshop.org/p/books/the-message-deluxe-gift-bible-leather-look-pink-and-gold-waves-the-bible-in-contemporary-language-eugene-h-peterson/18593056?ean=9781641586108>

<sup>3</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins and Harold W. Attridge, [Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark](#), Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 519.

<sup>4</sup> <https://stmarkshonolulu.org/rectors-blog/2014/1/30/from-the-rector-anamnesis.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/anamnesis/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://stfrncis.org/the-other-procession/>