

Luke 23:1-25

“When Hosannas are Heard”

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Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA
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The Reading: Luke 23:1-25

Narrator: Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. They began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.” Then Pilate asked him:

Pilate: “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Jesus: “You say so.”

Narrator: Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no basis for an accusation against this man.” But they were insistent and said:

People: “He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.”

Narrator: When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And when he learned that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, and said to them:

Pilate: “You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him.”

Narrator: Then they all shouted out together:

People: “Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!”

Narrator: This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder. Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; but they kept shouting:

People: “Crucify, crucify him!”

Narrator: A third time he said to them:

Pilate: “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.”

Narrator: But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

“Everybody Knows,” is a song by Leonard Cohen, and it starts this way:
“Everybody knows that the dice are loaded; everybody rolls with their fingers crossed. Everybody knows the war is over; everybody knows the good guys lost. Everybody knows the fight was fixed. The poor stay poor, the rich get rich. That's how it goes; everybody knows.”

Everybody knows that the arrest, trial, and execution of Jesus was a terrible miscarriage of justice and an example of bad leadership.

Many different leaders were involved in this fiasco, both religious and secular leaders of the time, with different types and levels of authority. They exercised their power, sometimes *directly* taking charge, and other times under cover of darkness. The Chief Priests, Scribes, and Elders of Jesus’ faith group were the religious leaders that plotted against him; it is sobering to note that it was *the clergy* that seized Jesus!¹

The ultimate *secular* leader was Pilate, the Roman governor. King Herod was somewhere in between. Rome had appointed him as the King of the Jews, but just so long as he would keep all the rest of his nation in line and make sure that Rome received its tribute money. These earthly leaders followed their own devices in support of “the domination system.”²

As far as Jesus’ case was concerned, these leaders did not care about the truth; rather they perverted it. For example, they accused Jesus of insurrection and then released Barabbas, an *actual* insurrectionist! They also did not seek *God’s* will in what to do. Therefore, when they had the chance, many leaders failed to support Jesus, the One, True, Good Leader, whom God had sent to save us all. They sentenced him to death.

¹Fred B. Craddock, *Luke* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 262.

²“Domination System” is a label that Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan, *The Last Week* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 7-8, use for the way of organizing societies in ancient and pre-modern times. A domination system is marked by these three characteristics: political oppression, economic exploitation, and religious legitimation.

Luke adds that the responsibility also falls upon “the people.” In his gospel, “the people” is at first a positive term. It was the group who had been with Jesus in the countryside and who had been there for him at his Palm Sunday parade. It becomes a negative attribution when the same people either were not present in the courtyard before Pilate, or turned against him. You and I are also included in “the people” and implicated.

Why did they not speak up for Jesus? I suppose that the people may have been acting out of old habits of occupation, cowed and afraid, or maybe they weren’t sure any longer what leader was in line with God. I hope that they weren’t just too busy that day, like *we* often are, or tired from the Palm Sunday proceedings, or naïve about evil, telling themselves that if they didn’t show up and ‘vote’ for Jesus that nothing bad would happen to him, or worse, say to themselves: “Let *God* take care of it.” Whatever the cause, the result was that they and we, by extension, left Jesus alone to walk that lonesome valley.

Jesus certainly needed to hear hosannas of support when he was in custody and when the Jewish authorities, Herod, and Pilate were grilling him. “All Hail!” should have at least been heard from those who followed Jesus, that is, from The Twelve, the disciples, the women, and all those who welcomed him through Jerusalem’s city gate. The people should have been ready with palms when Pilate asked, “What say *ye*?”

As true today as then, we need to shout hosannas in support of good leaders, allowing them to continue in God’s Direction and Dream. Encouragement and praise, honor and respect will take the Church further than criticism and division, especially if we want to nurture even *more* good leaders among the next generations.

This means that for RCC and your new settled pastor to be successful, you must voice hosannas of support to each other along the way. This doesn’t mean being ‘yes men and women’ to the pastor, but being diligent about praise and participation.

Along with this, when everybody knows how wrong things have become, we must let Hosannas of support be heard for what is right and good!

I remember being impressed with a friend, though not a churchgoer, who reserved Sunday mornings to write letters to his legislators and community leaders about upcoming bills and issues, commending them when they did what was right. In our democracy, the practice of “We, the people” means making the extra effort to show up, speak up, and stand up. **That’s when I hear the hosannas!**

In movements for a just and peaceful world, we must also exert “the stubborn ounces of our weight.”³ For example, the atrocities of the Russians toward the Ukrainian people right now are intolerable! It was a small, but welcome move – I rejoiced that the UN Human Rights Council removed Russia from its membership this week. At present it only has the authority to “name and shame,” and I wish there was a more proactive, nonviolent way to respond and prevent human rights violations! But it was a ‘hosanna’ toward what is right and good.

³ A line from the poet Bonaro Overstreet.

Atrocities are not only happening there, of course. Right now, in the waters that flow from the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia, humanitarian agencies are drawing out tortured, dead bodies from the Civil War. I know that this report is a small step in proportion to this evil, and more support can and must be given, but when everybody knows that evil is being done, **that's when Hosannas must be heard.**

Today is when we need to shout out "Hosanna! God save us!"