

No Kings Hosannas
Sermon preached at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
March 29, 2026
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Given the timing, it's impossible to ignore the parallels between the No Kings rallies yesterday across the country and the events we celebrate on Palm Sunday. A Christian Education site, Illustrated Ministries, created this sign for Christians to use at the No Kings rallies.¹ The sign is meant to be held at the protest - with the word "Hosanna" in large block letters, beneath which it says "save us from" with space to write in a word or phrase. The edges of the sign are decorated with images of palm leaves, and within those images you can see a hand upraised.



I keep wondering - what would our signs say? Hosanna, save us from: tyranny, oppression, violence against innocents, injustice ... Hosanna, save us.

"Hosanná" is a transliteration of a Hebrew term meaning "Oh, save now!" or "Please save!" Hosanna is a plea, an entreaty. The crowd waving palms as Jesus processes into Jerusalem aren't celebrating Jesus or praising him - they are begging him to save them. "Hosanna," or "Jesus save me" They are crying out for salvation. This is the ultimate no kings rally - hosanna they cry out.

Years ago, John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg co-authored a book called *The Last Week*. It begins with their description of this moment.

They write:

Two processions entered Jerusalem on a spring day in the year 30. . . One a peasant procession, the other an imperial procession. From the east, Jesus rode a donkey down the Mount of Olives, cheered by his followers. On the opposite side of the city, from the west, Pontius Pilate, entered Jerusalem at the head of a column of imperial calvary and soldiers. Jesus' procession proclaimed the kingdom of God; Pilate's proclaimed the power of empire.²

The crowds cry out to Jesus to be saved from the power of empire. Deliver us. Save us from Pilate, from Herod, from Caesar and the misery of Roman oppression. Hosanna - save us, now!

Which is why yesterday's No Kings rally across the country resonates with the events of today's palm procession. The language may be different, but the underlying pleas are essentially the same - "Hosanna - save us from oppression." And why this morning's palm waving may feel less like pageantry, and more real than ever.

Palm Sunday makes a lot more sense when we understand the crowd as desperate subjects of a bloody empire.³ That perspective also helps explain why things shift so quickly during this week. As we'll soon hear in the reading of the Passion, the crowd will change its tune within the course of a few days.

Diana Butler Bass argues that it's not so much that the crowd turns on Jesus, as they realize he won't be able to save them. Once the Roman soldiers enter the fray, and Jesus is arrested, the reality of the situation sets in. Arguably, it's not that they betray Jesus - it's that they **capitulate**. The crowd capitulates - still desperate and afraid, but now doing what they feel they have to do in order to save their skins. And by capitulating they have accepted their fate - they will remain enslaved to the empire.⁴

But that's not all of the story - we walk these days of holy week in awe of God's greater reality. Jesus will still save them - the fearful crowd, the frightened "capitulaters," the hiding disciples, and the faithful but powerless women followers. Jesus saves them all, though not as anyone hoped or expected. Salvation will come - but the journey to the kingdom of God, to an anti-imperial kingdom of justice and mercy, will be marked by a cross.⁵

We are still a frail and fearful people, oppressed by a brutal regime, and we are tempted to capitulate, or at least lie low and hope to save our own skins. But we know what the crowds at the Eastern Gate in Jerusalem did not - salvation comes. Jesus saves us all. Which doesn't fix all the problems of this world - as we well know. There will still be oppression and brokenness - even on the far side of Easter's glory. And maybe right now it's difficult to imagine getting to a place of "Alleluia."

Which is okay - we still have Hosanna, even when we are so overwhelmed or discouraged by the injustice and oppression of this world that we feel we have no Alleluia left. It's faithful to wave our palms in protest, in desperation, fear, and heartache, and cry out, "Hosanna - Jesus, pay attention now. Save us, save us all."

This week we walk the road through the Eastern gate, and continue the journey through Jerusalem, to the cross, and the tomb, and the garden. We will turn to that road immediately following this sermon - transitioning to the liturgy of the passion. On Thursday we gather with the disciples in the upper room, for the last supper and hand washing, (slightly less vulnerable than foot washing).

On Friday we walk the stations of the cross, either in this sanctuary or through downtown Pittsfield. And on Saturday we share the service of the Vigil: the fire, word, water, and feast; baptizing three children of this parish, and celebrating with our siblings in Christ, the people and clergy of the Campus of Downtown Churches.

And then, we gather on Easter morning to celebrate the most impossible good news - the way of the cross throws open the way to the kingdom of God. We will proclaim our Alleluias, but even then, it is faithful to hold onto our Hosannas. "Save us, save us all."

Oh, Beloved Ones, it is good to walk this road together. As we wave our palms, and cry out our hosannas, this Holy Week and beyond. Amen.

¹ <https://www.illustratedministry.com/2026/palm-sunday-no-kings/>

² More information about the book: <https://marcusjborg.org/books/the-last-week-2/>

³ *inspired by* Dr. Diana Butler Bass, "Hosanna, Not Alleluia - Episode #4177," Sunday April 13, 2025

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