

The noise of the Passover crowd draws you to your flat roof overlooking the eastern entry into Jerusalem. Its cool today, Passover is early this year. Every year crowds of devout pilgrims converge upon Jerusalem for the harvest Feast of Tabernacles and again for this the Passover celebration. It is always a noisy time, the people climb up the hill to Jerusalem, loudly reciting Psalms, praising God and giving thanksgiving for the harvest, or calling upon God to continue to extend God's protection over the people of Israel, the people God led out of Egypt so long ago.

Central to the pilgrimage every year is a reciting a group of Psalms, songs to be sung as the devout make the long climb up the hill to the city and to the Temple, God's dwelling place upon earth. People never tire of proclaiming that "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Right after that today's Psalm calls out "O Lord, save us; O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

You think of the Psalm's gates of righteousness, the symbolic gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter into God's presence. At this time of year, with all this shouting and celebration, you often wonder if the gates of the city are the same gates that King David entered, dancing and shouting and playing instruments as he led the Ark of the Covenant into the city. That must have been a wild celebration! The Chronicles state that King David got so carried away that he was dancing naked at the head of the procession! You find that hard to imagine, the greatest king that Israel has

ever had shouting and singing and dancing with such joy. Still, bringing the ark, the symbol of God's presence with God's people, into Jerusalem, the city established as the center of God's people, marked one of the greatest points in our history. It marked the end of the travels, the wandering, of God's people that started with the Exodus from Egypt as God led us here.

Since the time of David, there have been many years of joy, many years of sadness. Israel was taken into captivity, suffering in foreign lands while the Temple built by David's son was destroyed. God's people returned when they could, when God changed the hearts of foreign rulers. Jerusalem and the Temple were rebuilt. Those who still live away from Jerusalem, and are able, come for at least one of the great feasts each year. Ever since the Exodus, the Feast of Passover has marked God's leading of the people, has marked God's presence with God's people. It is when we celebrate God among us.

The tone of the crowd is changing. Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! This is sounding more intense than most years, as if the word has come alive. Hosanna, just the word itself takes your thoughts in new directions. Hosanna! God save us! God has saved us; God continues to save us! Sometimes God has saved us from foreign powers; sometimes God has saved us from our own unrighteousness. In the Psalm, Hosanna is a plea for salvation and an acclamation, a shout of joyful adoration. We adore God; in the truest sense we adore, we pray to, the one true God and to God alone. What a wonderful

word, full of pleas for God's protection and simultaneously rejoicing, thanking God, for each day that the Lord has made. Someday we will call out Hosanna to the one who comes from God to lead us free from our captivity, who restores us to our exalted place as God's people. Someday, we will call out Hosanna to the one who leads us through the physical gates of the Temple as well as the Lord's gates of righteousness that lead us closer to God.

The crowd is ever more fervently shouting Hosanna! Hosanna! and waving Palm Branches, a symbol of victory. A figure upon a donkey enters the city. Rumors are all over town: the Messiah has arrived! The Messiah, God's anointed leader, a king, has arrived! But this, this man on a donkey, just is not a king. A king rides into a city in triumph, in a great chariot, a chariot covered with gold, or on a mighty war horse, prancing along with barely controlled power. A king does not arrive on a donkey! A king leads a great army; the army marching behind him underscores, enforces, his power and authority. This man leads instead a small band of people. They look dirty and dusty and poor even for pilgrims. No powerful group declares their support; there are none of the trappings of power and authority invested in this man. Without power, how will he enforce his will upon others?

What is it that the crowd sees in this man upon a donkey, this Jesus? They act as if God is with them! More than the Ark, the symbol of God's presence, they act as if this is actually God! You start examining the crowd. You try to pick out faces, find people

you might have seen before or that you know. There are young and old, men and women pilgrims along with those of Jerusalem all mixed together in this crowd waving palm branches. There - over there isn't that the blind man, the one born blind, that Jesus healed? Could that really be a Samaritan woman? What could she possibly be doing here? There are extra Roman troops observing the crowd, making sure it doesn't get out of control. You have heard about the Roman Centurion who's son was healed by Jesus, could he be that officer standing apart over there?

Incredible diversity is in this crowd. Perhaps Jerusalem has finally become a light upon a hill. God always wanted it to be a beacon to all people, a beacon inviting all to come and enter and worship. A beacon of hope to all people that they would find God present here. A beacon that pierces that darkness of evil and lets the truth of God's love shine out. Perhaps we have tried to hoard this light thinking that it is only for us. Imagine, trying to hold onto light! Perhaps this light really is a wonderful gift for all of the world, not just those of Israel.

Perhaps, perhaps, this is the Messiah, a new kind of king. A king full of a power that comes from God alone. A Messiah that leads us through the gates of righteousness, who fulfills the calls of Hosanna! God save us! Perhaps this crowd of young and old, of Jew and Samaritan and Gentile, of the blind who can now see, the lepers who have been healed, are truly God's people. The joy, the intensity, the conviction in their cries make you think that you have been as blind as the man who has now been healed!

With that thought, you rush off of the roof, joining the crowd, calling out:

Hosanna to the Son of David!  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest!

Let us add our loud Hosanna! Let us be the crowd, the people of God, who call out in prayer and in praise and in adoration as Jesus enters into our midst. As Jesus, Son of God, throws wide the gates of righteousness, calling for all people, for all of God's people, to enter in. Let us enter, renew, reaffirm our relationship with Jesus, the son of God.

It is good to join together in the excitement as the King enter in, grasping palm branches, crying Hosanna! But that ancient crowd melted away, leaving the king to die alone. There were no crowds that first Resurrection Sunday. But ever since, crowds have gathered together, praising and worshiping Christ the King, victor over death, the King who continues to save us. Crowds throughout history gather together, renewing the cry of Hosanna! Let us join with these crowds at Resurrection, and each following Sunday, as we proclaim Hosanna to the Risen, Living Lord. Let us spend time this week thinking about the God we worship, the God who lived and died and lives again for us.

Let us, the crowd, the doubters, the tempted and blind, outsiders and spectators, join our voices as we thank God for the gates of righteousness thrown open by his love and grace. Let us praise God for the gift of salvation that God has freely offered to us, to all of us, as God's people.

Lord, we cry out Hosanna in the highest as we are caught up in the excitement of the crowd, as Jesus, the king upon a donkey, rides through our midst. Grant that we might experience the same excitement as we declare with each new day: “This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Each new day, help us to give thanks that your lovingkindness, your grace and mercy that surround us, are forever.

Amen.