

I'll never forget that day, what a glorious day it was.

A warm, spring day, with a slight breeze.

The sun was shining, not a cloud was in the sky.

We knew Jesus would be coming to Jerusalem at any moment, after all, the Passover Festival was soon and he always came to the city to celebrate it.

Until that morning, though, we didn't know it would be today.

But word got out around town, people started talking, spreading the exciting news.

Then we started gathering.

We knew how he would enter the city.

He always came through the Jewish neighborhood, away from Caesar and his men.

When we heard he was coming, we laid down our cloaks in the street, and we wanted to make this a grand processional to celebrate his arrival, so we grabbed tree branches and passed them around for people to hold.

When we saw him walking up to the city, we shouted "Hosanna, Hosanna!"

You see, Hosanna means "*Save us.*"

It's the same Hebrew word that is in Psalm 118, as it says, "*Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!*"

He was the one we had been waiting for!

We were so tired of living in diaspora, away from our other Jewish brothers and sisters.

We were tired of being treated like second-class citizens.

We were tired of having to be discreet, having to hide who we were.

The Romans didn't exactly penalize us for being Jewish and for celebrating our holidays, but they certainly weren't happy about it.

They loomed over us, patrolled our streets, questioned us, and forced us to pay so much money to Caesar.

We knew that we were powerless against Caesar, and that he could take away our freedoms and rights at anytime, so we lived in constant fear and anxiety.

You can see why we were so happy that Jesus had come.

We believed with every fiber of our being that he was going to change things.

He was going to save us.

He had the power and influence to challenge Caesar.

He would get us our own self-governed land, or maybe he would organize an army to fight Caesar, lead an uprising.

We didn't know what his plans were, but finally our days of oppression and occupation were coming to an end.

We, the Jewish people, had been living under the thumb of ruling regimes for thousands of years.

We were desperate for real, true, freedom.

The day had finally arrived.

Jesus was here, everything would soon change.

Well.

Things did change, drastically, and quickly, but not in the ways that we would have hoped.

You see, on that Sunday which you all call Palm Sunday, we were all there, one voice, begging, pleading and celebrating.

We were finally going to be liberated.

But just a few days later, things took a wrong turn, or so we thought.

After he was arrested, we were all in the center of town, in the middle of the festival, and Pilate asked us, "*Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?*" (Mark 15:9).

And so many people shouted, "*Crucify him! Crucify him!*"

None of us who were celebrating him the Sunday before, none of us had the courage to speak up.

This crowd was powerful, and big, and angry.

If any of us spoke out, they might put us up there with Jesus and we might be crucified too.

Remember, in the Roman Empire, we were powerless, oppressed.

We had to look out for ourselves.

I mean, yes, we loved Jesus, but then we began to question everything we had believed.

Maybe he wasn't the Messiah after all.

Maybe he was a fraud.

The Messiah should be able to save himself.

If he really performed all those miracles and raised Lazarus from the dead, surely, the moment when his own life was on the line, that wasn't the time when he was going to withhold his powers.

If he knew how desperately we needed him, if he really knew how much our lives depended on him, he would have defended himself, he would have fought back against Herod and Pilate and the whole Sanhedrin.

If this powerful man couldn't save himself, there was nothing any of us could do.

Our standing up for him wouldn't help.

It was just get in us in trouble along with him.

I also think that we were all too scared to be the first one to speak out.

Nobody wanted to be the first, so there was no second or third.

That's the problem, when nobody speaks up for what is right and good, all you hear is silence.

It wasn't silent in the center of town, the people shouting "Crucify him!" were mighty loud.

But the rest of us, who didn't think it was right, we who knew he was innocent, we were silent.

There was no voice to counter those who were screaming for him to be killed.

Silence from all of us who were singing and waving palms and praising him just days before.

We accepted the fact that he must not have been the one we were waiting for, after all.

And so we returned to our homes, heads hung in shame and sadness, resigned to wait for the next person to come along who really would be our savior.

Jesus' followers thought that he was only there for them, to save them, and the Jewish people who would come after them.

But they were mistaken.

Jesus didn't come only for the Jewish people who lived in Roman-occupied lands between 0 and 33 CE.

Jesus came to offer salvation to all of us, everyone who had ever lived and everyone who would ever live.

He didn't come for any specific people at any one place or point in time.

Yes, Jesus was there for the people who waved their palm branches and cried out, "Hosanna!"

But he wasn't only there for them, he knew his task was greater than that small population.

Our salvation is collective, not just for one generation, or people living in one land.

It's for all of humanity, as it comes from the Latin word meaning wholeness or healing.

Salvation is moving beyond fragmentation, compartmentalization, and all of us, guided by our faith, working together to heal the wounds of our existence.

Salvation is hope from despair, liberation for all of us, because when one of us is captive, we all are.

Salvation is return from exile, the healing of our dis-eases and being made right with God.

Being made whole means relying on God while being Jesus' hands and feet in the world, at this moment in time.

He was killed by humans in one of the most brutal ways possible, but his death is what allowed for us to be his followers, 2,000 years later.

It's our job to not let his death be in vain.

To keep his spirit, his values, his teachings alive in this world, through our words and our actions.

The moment when Jesus' message is totally forgotten and there are no more people inspired by him, no more people changing the world in his name, that will be the day when Jesus truly dies.

Let us make sure this doesn't happen, by doing our part to live lives, which are in service to his message.

Let us do what we can to bring our world that much closer to the beloved community, and then hand it off to the ones who will come after us.

Jesus' followers, the ones who celebrated him, who begged him to save them on that bright and sunny day as he walked into Jerusalem, they didn't have the courage to stand up and speak out for him just a few days later.

The people shouting "Crucify him!" were just too powerful, his motley crew of followers just couldn't drown them out, they weren't willing to take the risk.

Well, who are we going to be?

When others shout crucify him, crucify the poor people, the indigenous people, the people of color whose ancestors came here as chattel slaves, the trans people, the undocumented people, the queer people, the young people who lead the March for Our Lives, when others say, “Crucify them!”, are we going to stay silent?

Are we going to say, “they don’t really mean it”?

Are we going to shrug our shoulders and walk away saying, “What a shame”?

Or are we going to have the courage to say, “Do not crucify the powerless at the altar of money and greed!”

Are we going to say, “No, they killed him but they’ll never kill his message of unconditional love!”

We must have the courage to speak not only with our voices, but with our money, and how we spend it, with our feet and where they go, and with all of our actions, everyday.

May we each be a living promise to God and to ourselves that we won’t be like those palm-wavers who abandoned Jesus just a few days later.

We will be the ones who stand up for the powerless, who keep Jesus’ message alive in this time and place.

Let us use our hands and our feet to carry this sacred message throughout our lives until we hand it off to the next generation, who will then do their part bring us towards collective salvation. Amen.