

**Save Us Now!**  
John 12:12 – 16  
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Years ago, when chain e-mails were popular, my dad received one of those “special” e-mails. It asked him to answer a bunch of questions and then told him to smile at the computer. It said that the computer would generate a picture of my dad. He was quite sure how this might work, since we didn’t have a camera on our computer. He gathered us *all* around our computer to watch.

We were *all* secretly jealous that dad got to it first, because *we* wanted to try this special program. We anxiously awaited the picture as dad clicked “next.”

He clicked “next,” and the resemblance was so striking, we howled! *This* was the result. Dad laughed about this picture for *days*; it was so hideous!

At that time, my dad was candidating for a call at a church in central California. Before coming to visit, he was asked to submit a picture of himself to the call committee. He *knew* he had to send this picture. How funny would it be for the call committee to open the letter to find *this* hideous picture of their candidate? He sent the picture, only *wishing* he could be there to see their faces and hoped they had a good sense of humor...

Can you imagine doing something like this for an interview? I wouldn’t recommend it, because you likely wouldn’t get the job. Somehow, this worked for my dad. The church perhaps loved him more *because* of this picture.

On Palm Sunday, we experience something perhaps *more* unexpected than my dad’s story. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell this story, but each has its own details and purpose for their story.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead, and many people believe in Jesus because of this. The chief priests and Pharisees become nervous and don't know what to do because of his popularity and the signs he performs. But "Caiaphas [says] to them, 'You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.' He [does] not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they [make] plans to put him to death. Jesus therefore no longer [walks] openly among the Jews, but [goes] from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he [stays] with the disciples" (Jn 11:49b – 54).

The people believe in Jesus when he raises Lazarus from the dead. The chief priests and Pharisees don't know what to do, and Caiaphas, the high priest, encourages them that Jesus *should* die for the protection of the nation and to gather together the children of God. Everyone is then encouraged to tell the chief priests and Pharisees if they know where Jesus is, so that they might arrest him.

It is now Passover, the occasion every year for Jews to make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem. A great number of pilgrims have come to Jerusalem, and many hope to see this man, Jesus, who raised Lazarus from the dead. Their concern is not to obey the chief priests and Pharisees by handing him over to be arrested; their concern is to *welcome* this savior, this king, because *he* will save them.

They hear that Jesus is on his way, so they take palm branches, and go out to meet him. They cry, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (Jn 12:13b).

The crowd is *excited* that their champion has come! They have never before seen *anyone* with as much power. They have seen him raise the dead, after all! He has demonstrated power over death; he *must* be the one they have waited for, their savior. *He* will save them from their Roman enemies.

They anticipate what Jesus will do for them, so they celebrate early. They wave their palm branches for their soon-to-be victor.<sup>1</sup> They wave palm branches as we might wave flags for a president or war hero.

They *cry out* for Jesus to save them. They use the words of Psalm 118, which was recited during the time of the Passover. This Psalm was a prayer to God to save Israel from her enemies, and the crowd directs this prayer to *Jesus*. “Hosanna! [Save now!] Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Jn 12:13b). They add, “Even the king of Israel!” “Hosanna! [Save now!] Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel!” (Jn 12:13b). To them, Jesus is not simply one who comes in the name of the Lord; he *is* the one they expect to save them, for *he* is the king of Israel.

They expect Jesus to save them from their enemies. They expect Jesus to wage war on Rome.

And so, in response, does Jesus take a warhorse and parade through the crowd? No, he finds a young donkey and sits on it. The crowd has great hopes of a

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner, *John*, 709.

conquering king, and Jesus decides to sit on a donkey. In the Gospel of John, Jesus finds a donkey only *after* he knows what the people want from him. They want Jesus to go to war, and he goes ahead and sits on a donkey.

Jesus chooses a common animal *because* he wants to communicate something very different. The people will cheer and shout, but Jesus won't come in like a war hero; he will come humbly, riding on a donkey. He *will* be the king of the Jews, but that will become manifest in a *very* different way on Friday. He will be the savior of his people, but he will also be the savior of *all* peoples.

It is easy for us to look at this scene and feel detached. We know what Jesus' future will be and that he *didn't* save his people and all peoples through power or war. We know that Jesus became the savior through weakness. We look at the people and think, *they should have known better. They should have known that Jesus would not save them from the Romans.*

What is ironic and true, is that you and I do the same thing. We want God to come in a mighty way and to save us *now*. Save us now from injustices – racism, sexism, ageism – *all* the “ism's.” Save us now from corrupt politics and those who exploit others. Save us now from systems that oppress.

We *long* for the world to be made right, for *all* people to be treated with care and respect. We *know* this will not be fully possible on this side of eternity, but we continue to cry out, “Save us now!”

This God to whom we pray is the same God who heard the cries of the Jews for thousands of years, “Save us now!” This is the same God who chose *not* to save through power, but through weakness. God brought all peoples to Himself through

Jesus' death on the cross, not a sign of power, but of ultimate humiliation, rejection, and pain.

Martin Luther claimed that God not only chose to *save* through weakness, but that God *always acts* through weakness. Luther called this a “theology of the cross.” A theology of the cross “contradicts the assumptions we normally have about life. It says that God is most reliably present not in our strengths or our successes or the things we like best about ourselves. Rather, God is present and working in the world exactly in the place where [we are] falling apart, where [we] are discovering the limits of [our] power instead of its possibilities.”<sup>2</sup> *God is present and working in the world exactly in the place where [we are] falling apart, where [we] are discovering the limits of [our] power instead of its possibilities.* And He will continue to be present in our weakness, because “[God’s] power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore...boast all the more gladly about [your] weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on [you]” (2 Cor 12:9).

September of last year, we had the wonderful privilege of hosting 15 homeless women at our church in a little something you might know about, called “Village House.” A handful of women came together every Monday night for a Bible study. And on that final Bible study, I wanted to offer a blessing to the women by anointing their heads with oil. Others who had gathered from St. Timothy’s wanted to be anointed too, so I anointed them just as the Village House guests.

When everyone was anointed, I closed the bottle of oil and sat down. Tammy, one of the guests, looked at me and said, “Well, you’ve got to be anointed too! We

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mbird.com/glossary/theology-of-the-cross/>

can't leave you out!" She took the bottle of oil, called me by name, and traced a sign of the cross on my forehead. I can't remember the words she spoke, but she moved me deeply.

Jesus loves me! This I know,  
For the Bible tells me so;  
Little ones to Him belong;  
They are weak, but He is strong.

*Refrain:*

Yes, Jesus loves me!  
Yes, Jesus loves me!  
Yes, Jesus loves me!  
The Bible tells me so.<sup>3</sup>

*This* is how God in Jesus Christ does His work – through weakness. For when we are weak, He is strong. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Jesus\\_Loves\\_Me/](http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Jesus_Loves_Me/)