

I wonder how many movies have this particular plot development. Potential Disaster besets the earth. Alien invasion, asteroid, superstorm, sharknado...The leader or leaders put together a plan to avert disaster. The Leader or leaders announce their plan via a Television or radio broadcast. And so often the announcement ends with "God save us all." Up to this point in the movie, God has been remarkably absent. Now I'm not trying to go off on an anti-Hollywood tirade, although, most of these movies are horrible (in my opinion), but in fact, I think there is an element of truth to how we treat God. God is so often our measure of last resort. I wanted to find the particular movie I was thinking of, so I used a movie script database and searched for multiple forms of "God help us all." The return list was in the thousands. I decided that wasn't worth my time. God as the measure of last resort is prevalent in our culture and our lives. When we are really in trouble, when things get really bad, that's when we'll turn to God.

I recall when I was in Jr. High, my family decided we needed to improve the quality of our prayer time at meals. So, rather than just blessing the meal, we were to go around the table and share something about which we needed God's help. One time it came to me, and I asked for God's help on a test I had the next day. Now, I could feel the hot stare dad looming next to me. As I completed my prayer, my dad, without hesitating and with his stoic cynicism, said to me, "You would be better to ask God for the willpower to perhaps not watch so much TV and spend a few minutes studying." Needless to say, this way of praying didn't last long, and we returned to a simple blessing of the food the next day. But my dad may have taught me a valuable lesson about the prayer of last resort and my personal cry of "God save me."

On Palm Sunday, we begin by recognizing the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, we read the cry of "Hosanna" as a cry of adoration and praise, but there is another possibility. The meaning can be "Save us." So, in much the same way as those movie plots, Jesus is the recipient of the prayer of last resort. The cry of Hosanna is a desperate plea from a desperate people. A people subject to the whims of the Roman empire. A people who feel let down by their own religious and secular leaders, a people poverty-stricken with no hope of changing their situation. They wanted a person, they wanted Jesus, to change it all, but on their terms.

We may be tempted to think that we are not much like those people gathered at the gates of Jerusalem but sit and listen to most people for a while, and you'll start to hear their prayers of last resort. Their concerns for the future, for the government, their community, their children, their family, their church. It can all come across in so many ways. Their concern for their grandchildren's cell phone use, family members with addictions, a disdain for a political figure or their opposition, a church that just isn't like it use to be. All this could be punctuated with the phrase "God save us!"

The problem in that first Century setting, and probably in our setting too, is that we easily cry Hosanna, but whatever happens, God, don't change us. In our own day, the Christianity of self-improvement is an easy sell. A church that tells you ten ways to make a better you, outpaces a church that says you will be broken to be transformed. The church that asks that you give up your view of perfection and success and instead become focused on the needs of others is a tough sell. Improve me, don't change me. God save me, but don't transform me.

Under these conditions, it might be easier to understand why the crowd turned on Jesus so quickly, why the cry of "Hosanna" became a cry of "Crucify Him!" They had no need of a God who would challenge their values and expectations and their view of neighbor, but instead, they wanted one who would only serve to validate their own self-importance. I know that I too fall into this pattern easily. It's so effortless

to talk about self-improvement than to experience transformation, and a lot less painful. I am way more like that crowd crying out "Save Us" than I care to admit. I could easily become the one who cries "Crucify Him!" and stand having to be forgiven because I just don't know what I am doing.

But God desires so much for us. He desires authentic relationship with us and us with one another. What if we could put our faith ahead of our personal sense of well-being? What if could seek and discover a love that draws us away from complacency and comfort? What if what needs to die in me is my own self-importance? We cry "God save us!" But there is a cost; there is something in us of which we must let go. I wonder if we are able to forego our need for success and perfection, so that we may find authentic love and relationship with God and one another.

God, indeed, save us all!