

SERMON Luke 19: 28- 44 The Stones Will Cry Out

I read something interesting about Palm Sunday a few years ago. Ask a child in church what is exciting about Christmas and they're likely to say Santa Claus. Ask that child what is exciting about Easter and they're likely to say Easter baskets and eggs. But ask them what's exciting about Palm Sunday and it's Jesus coming into town! Jesus has managed to stay the star of Palm Sunday after 2000 years. I want to thank Zoey and Tarus and the adults in our procession and to Loretta with your special music- you brought a taste of the first Palm Sunday's excitement right into this room.

Because today is the day Jesus' followers celebrate that our King arrived in the holy city of Jerusalem. But it is also a day when we are aware that the palms will soon dry out, the donkey will return back to its owner, people will gather their cloaks back, and the cheers will fade. The disciple in the video may have not have known what was going to happen next, but we do. Friday's coming, when Jesus will still be hailed as King, but only as an insult on a sign nailed over his head as he hangs on a cross to die.

The story of Jesus entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey is in all four gospels. Each gospel gives a different slant on this event but when a story is included in all four gospels, you can know that it is a pivotal story in the life of Jesus that deserves our attention. Although we have palms everywhere this morning, Luke's gospel does not mention people waving palms, nor does Luke describe a great crowd of people, although Jerusalem was flooded with people who had come for the Passover celebration just as Jesus and his disciples had. Passover was a time of heightened anticipation as God's people gathered to remember when God had rescued them from slavery in the past, and when they longed again for God to rescue them from the Romans this time. Out of all these people, Luke focused on the smaller crowd of Jesus' disciples. The disciples threw their cloaks on the ground as Jesus rode by and shouted out their praise without reservation. It was what people did when a king arrived. They covered the road with their cloaks to provide their version of rolling out the red carpet for the king. Did they sense that Zechariah's words we read as the Call to Worship was finally happening?

Rejoice greatly, Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

If you've ever been in a crowd of excited people, the excitement can be very contagious. One person shouts out a statement and everyone repeats it. Often what is shouted takes on a rhythm. *What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now!* Is that what happened? *Blessed is the King! He comes in the name of the Lord! Who is our King? Jesus is our King!* Can you feel the excitement in the air as they say it over and over? Here was the One they had been waiting for, here was the One they could trust, here was their new king! No longer does Jesus tell them to keep it secret. They could shout and sing so shout and sing they did!

And yet, the image of King that Jesus portrays was not the normal image of a King. Kings were powerful people whose decisions were law and who had the power of life and death in their voice. If the King wanted you dead, you died. Kings rode into cities on their royal stallions portraying power and wealth and military might. They made it clear who was in control. Yet, Luke presents Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a gentle donkey as a King bringing peace. The disciples' shouts of "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest," echo the angels' words at Jesus' birth,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

And isn't peace from their Roman conquerors what the people longed for? Peace in their own land? Surely everyone in Jerusalem would join in the shouts. *What do we want? Peace! When do we want it? Now!* But Jesus will soon weep over the city because they didn't recognize that this was the time of God's coming to them. They didn't recognize Jesus as God's way to the peace they longed for.

Because not everyone **was** excited that day. The Pharisees were watching as Jesus and his disciples came into town with their shouts and excitement, declaring Jesus as King. The Pharisees didn't join the cheers. "Jesus, rebuke your disciples!"

Luke's gospel generally takes a kinder view of the Pharisees than the other gospels. Luke includes stories of the Pharisees inviting Jesus to dinner, at one point they even warn Jesus that Herod was out to kill him so that he could safely slip out of town. So their motive is not clear in this story- were they angry that Jesus' disciples were praising Jesus as their King? Or were they calling for Jesus to quiet them so the Romans would not be upset. The Pharisees knew that the Roman government would be threatened by a crowd declaring Jesus as their king instead of Caesar, and could send troops in to stop the revolution with a blood bath.

My favorite part is Jesus' response back to the Pharisees. Only Luke tells this part. "I tell you, if my disciples were silent, the stones would cry out." This was an important day of decision- were they for Jesus or against him? Jesus was going to be praised that day one way or another- either the people or nature itself would praise him. God had come to town and it was time to sing his praise.

Friends, as we continue on our journey of stones on our way to the cross, it is our time to sing his praise. Here we are beginning Holy Week. Will we take our place in the crowd of witnesses who through history have acknowledged Jesus as King? In every generation, there have been people who have told Jesus' followers to be quiet, to keep your faith to yourself. After all, aren't there three topics that have always been considered impolite for conversation- sex, politics, and religion? And yet in every generation, followers of Jesus have stood and claimed Jesus as King even as if it meant being scorned or their death. Most of the 12 apostles and other believers were martyred in Jesus' name. Missionaries have lost their lives sharing the gospel. During our lifetime, it happens too. The first student shot to death at Columbine High School in 1999, was Rachel Joy Scott, a devout Christian. The shooters had harassed her many times before because of her faith. The student she was eating lunch with that day reported that Eric Harris shot her twice in the leg, then in the back and then left. When he returned a few minutes later and found her still alive he asked her, "Do you still believe in God now?" and when she said yes, he said, "Then go be with him," and he shot her in the head. Even more recently, twenty-one Coptic Christians were beheaded by ISIS because of their faith. I can only hope that if I face a situation like these Christians, I will have their courage to stand and say, "Yes, I believe in Jesus."

Few of us in this room will ever face these dramatic kinds of choices. But every day we face the choice of whether we will voice our praise. Every morning, we have the opportunity to praise the God who kept us through the night. As we drink our morning coffee and read the paper or watch the news, we have the opportunity to praise the God who brings us inner peace in spite of all that is going on in the world. As we go about our days, exercising or shopping or cooking or working in the yard, we have the opportunity to praise God for what we enjoy and for how he provides for our needs. When we see a beautiful sunrise or sunset, we have the chance to praise the Creator, rather than merely soak in the beauty. When the healing we prayed for comes, do we thank God or just the doctor? When sorrow comes, can we still praise God for his faithfulness and his presence

with us? One other bit of information about Rachel Scott, the Columbine student- one of the bullets they shot at her pierced her journal. And in the aftermath, in her journal was found a prayer she had prayed earlier for one of the shooters after he had been making fun of her faith in Christ. It was no accident that she was the first student killed. Rachel was a young woman who used her voice to acknowledge Christ as King and even to pray for those who mocked her. The rocks didn't have to sing the day she died because she did, just as she had every day.

I invite you to take out your stone. It's a different kind of stone today because we're going to keep them this time so they can remind us that it is our time to sing and praise. Place it somewhere where you will see it during the day, and each time you see your stone, take a moment to praise God. Outloud. Hold it while we pray to remind us not to just give God our list of things we want him to do for us, but to spend time praising him for who he is through it all.

Here's my challenge for us this week, in particular, as we journey toward the cross on Friday and the tomb on Easter morning: It's easy to spend our time with people who believe like we do. And it's good to talk together about how good God is to us. It strengthens our faith. But I invite us to let our stones remind us that our voices are made for praise, and to tell at least one person this week in some way that we are thankful for Jesus' presence in our life. Not someone we know is already a Christian, but someone else- a neighbor, a family member or friend, even the checker in the grocery store or the post office. Someone. No need to be fake or preachy. "Praise Jesus!" Pray for an opening to speak that makes sense in the moment. Let's not let our praise be just in here where it's safe. Let it make a difference out there. Because outside of this room are people who long to hear about the One who brings real peace. Oh, there are plenty who don't care, but don't let that keep you from seeing the ones who long to hear. Jesus wept over Jerusalem because the people were missing out on the peace only God can bring. Do you ever weep over Issaquah? It's our time to sing, friends. It's our time to praise Christ our King. It's either us or the stones. Which will it be?