

Full to the Brim: Even the Stones Cry Out

Palm/Passion Sunday

Luke 19:28-40
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

Rev. Todd B. Freeman
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I was a bit intrigued when looking at the title used by the Lenten resource material we are using this year for this Palm Sunday, *Full to the Brim: Even the Stones Cry Out*. Seems like a strange focus. Looking back over previous sermons on Palm Sunday, which now is often labeled as Passion Sunday, most often the focus has been on the theme of expectations, especially what can happen when those expectations aren't meant. This is what happens to the crowd at the beginning of the week when their exuberant "Hosannas" quickly turn to a mob-like "Crucify him".

This approach brings in both the Palm and Passion elements into this one service, especially for those who don't attend the Maundy Thursday or Good Friday services of worship later in Holy Week. Otherwise, we simply jump straight from "Hosanna" on Palm Sunday to "Alleluia" on Easter Sunday, as if nothing happens between these two Sundays.

Some have poetically compared Holy Week to a symphony with distinct movements. These different movements unfold throughout the week, from "Hosanna in the highest!!!" to "Is it I?" to "Do this in remembrance of me" to "Remove this cup from me" to "I do not know him" to "Crucify him!" to "Father, forgive them" to "Into your hands I commend my spirit." Each of these symphonic movements need to be heard and played out over the course of this week to give clarity and meaning to Holy Week, and especially to a fuller understanding of Easter and the story of the Resurrection. This year, however, I'm simply going to assume that you will either come to the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services, or will remember these important events that take place before reaching the joy of Easter morning.

That brings us back to something to which I've never paid much attention, something that is only found in Luke's version of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. That's the rather strange response from Jesus, after some of the Pharisees asked him to quiet the exuberant crowd, who threw their cloaks on the ground in front of his procession, that **even if those disciples were silent, the stones would shout out**. There's actually a similar expression of this found in the Hebrew scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. In Habakkuk 2:11 the prophet writes that the stones will cry out against the corruption of the wicked.

Have you ever thought much about stones that shout? Interestingly, stones have played a very meaningful role in my life. Beginning when I was very young, I was fascinated by the beauty found in simple rocks I came across, like when walking along a path or in a stream. I would pick them up and put them in my pocket and later set them on a shelf in my bedroom. I had a huge collection. Also, adding to the fascination, as a hobby my maternal grandfather also did lapidary work, collecting, cutting, and polishing stones – stones that most wouldn't give a second look, but actually revealed remarkable beauty. No one is more excited than I that College Hill hosts the Tulsa Gem and Mineral

society, which share so much of the collections each month in the display case in the Fellowship Hall.

This fascination with rocks and stones and minerals never went away. And as some of you are aware, this is a major reason why I, while still in high school, decided to become a professional geologist. I graduated with a BS degree from that university located in Austin, Texas, that nobody here in Oklahoma every wants me to reference.

Throughout the many journeys in life, including many places overseas, I have taken a stone to remind me of the significance of that place, of what I experienced, including the people I was with. While I can say I have never heard stones shouting, in all honesty I have heard a few speak to me. I, and I know some of you, especially in our Celtic Circle group, have heard trees and nature itself speak to us of the Sacred Presence of God. I would love to share a few stories of some of the stones that have spoken to me, like one from Mt. Saini, another from the Scottish Isle of Iona during my sabbatical seven years ago, and one from 36 years ago at Mo-Ranch Presbyterian Conference Center in the Hill Country of Texas, which I interpreted as a confirmation of my call into ministry. Unfortunately, given the time constraints of this sermon, those stories will have to wait until another time.

Instead, I'd like to share some additional thoughts about this interesting verse of scripture, **"I tell you, if these [disciples] were silent, the stones would shout out" (v. 40). If you're thinking that might have political implications, you're right.** Given the fact that it is those in power, those in the center, who want to silence those on the margins, as was the case of the Pharisees in Jerusalem wanting to silence the followers of an itinerate preacher from Nazareth, our Lenten resource asks, **"As we begin our walk through Holy Week, let us ask: What can't be silenced? What must be said? What things can we not stay quiet about? What is bubbling up that we need to give voice to—faith questions, apologies, issues of justice, truth-telling?"**

Concerning the dynamic between those in the center of power and those on the margins, Rebecca Chopp, feminist theologian, wrote an article entitled, "When the Center Cannot Contain the Margins" (1989). Insook Lee, a biblical commentator referencing this article writes, **"The center refers to the dominant order, and the margins refer to those alienated from the power of the center.** Chopp argues that speaking from the positions of marginality requires imagination; therefore something unimaginable can come from this decentered location. Throughout history, new discourse and creative ideas have come from the periphery, often changing the course of history by altering the paradigms that underlie social reform and transformation. For this reason, **we often need to celebrate our 'marginalized' position.**" That is something a whole lot of people heard and even celebrated here in this congregation, this city, and even the nation during last year's **100th Anniversary of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre.**

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is meant to show the encounter between the center and the margin. Reflecting upon those who joyously and loudly welcomed Jesus in Jerusalem, resource biblical commentator, the Rev. Ashley DeTar Birt writes,

What they're feeling is too important, the kind of thing that just has to come out regardless of whether or not it makes others uncomfortable. The discomfort of others is often not enough of a reason to keep the silence. Expressing our joys, telling our truths, asking the questions we need to ask, repenting and making amends, being our honest and authentic selves—these things are too important to be silent. We shouldn't have to restrain ourselves because some may temporarily experience discomfort. **Rather, we should be free, like the rocks, the disciples... to cry out, to be loud, and to make whatever noise we need to make to exist.**

So, let me ask, **what truths, questions, confessions, and expressions are bubbling up to the surface—in you, in this community of faith, in Tulsa, in our country, and in the world? As we begin to journey through Holy Week, what truths, especially those at the margins, must be said out loud?** Lenten resource liturgical writer and poet, the **Rev. Sarah Speed** wrote a poem to go with this Sunday, entitled, *Even the Stones Will Cry Out*, which I will recite to close this Palm Sunday sermon.

Even the Stones Will Cry Out

The Pharisees found Jesus;
 they said,
 "Order your disciples to stop."
 It's not the first time
 justice was almost
 silenced. People stood on the
 sidelines shouting hosanna
 which means, "Save us,"
 "Save me."
 It's not the first time we've
 heard that cry from the street.
 The Pharisees said
 stop. They wanted the people
 quiet, but some things can't be
 silenced.
 Justice will bubble up,
 hope will raise its head,
 love will rise to the surface.
 Hate and fear will try to
 drown them out,
 but you cannot silence
 what was here first,
 which was love,
 and it was good.
 It was so good.
 So even the stones will cry out.
 Remember that
 at your parade.

 Justice will bubble up,
 hope will raise its head,
 love will rise to the surface.
 Amen.

Amen, indeed!

Resources:

Insook Lee, Luke 19:29-40, *Feasting on the Gospels*.

Stephanie Perdew, "What the stones have witnessed," christiancentury.org, 4-4-22.