

Pastor Joel gave this sermon on Palm Sunday, March 24, 2013. It is based on the gospel reading for that day, Luke 19:28-40 and is entitled, "Silent as Stones".

It's Palm Sunday. Are you there? Can you picture yourself in this story? Jesus has just come from Jericho, a trip of about 15 miles from the east, to Bethany and Bethphage. It will be another mile or 2 to Jerusalem, his ultimate destination. When they get to the Mount of Olives, just east of the Temple in, Jesus sends two of his disciples to get a donkey. It appears, by Luke's account, that the owners know Jesus, perhaps are even followers of his, as they allow the animal to be taken at the words, *"The Lord has need of it."* And it's important to note that it is a colt, in effect a virgin, not so much in the sexual sense, but because it has never been used, never ridden, and so it is "sacred." Meaning that the job it has to fulfill is a sacred mission. This will be no ordinary ride into the city. This is the culmination of a long journey, the end point of a 3-year ministry. And in the minds, the hopes and dreams of some there, perhaps the beginning of some great thing, some new, yet amazing unknown.

We may know this story of Palm Sunday pretty well, but Luke tells it a bit different than the others. For Luke this is clearly a sacred act. Even mentioning its beginnings on the Mount of Olives has meaning, as this was a revered place, with eschatological significance from the writings of the prophets (Zech. 14:4-5) and it was the place where Messiah was to appear. In Luke, the crowd is not the diverse group of pilgrims and foreigners entering the city for the great Passover festival who just happen to get caught up in Jesus' entrance. No, those entering with Jesus are his disciples, all of them, and they are no small band. Their number is significant. And like the author of Mark's gospel who reminds us often of the crowds that kept growing and growing around Jesus, until he could hardly move, so Luke has also frequently mentioned the crowds, the "multitudes", that were following him.

And here they are! This is in effect, a political rally. They have come to support their man and to accompany him in his work. Yet Luke tells us clearly, unlike the other gospel accounts, that this is not a political event. At least not in the sense that it is nationalistic. Here in Luke they spread their coats, their *"cloaks"* before him. There are no "Hosannas!", no waving or spreading of palms or branches cut from trees. Those belonged to parades and festivals with nationalistic overtones. That would have been an event staged by the Zealots, or those who were hoping for the overthrow of the Romans and the violent liberation of their country. There is no reference to Jesus being another "King David" or to Jesus as the "Son of David." And yet he is called a "King", the *"King who comes in the name of the Lord"* as the one called to in Psalm 118, which we read just earlier today. But he is a king of "Peace." And it is interesting that Luke seems to use words here near the end of his story: *"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest"*, that echo those he used at the beginning of this story, at the telling of Jesus' birth, when the angels sang out: *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased."* (Lk. 2:14).

So we have this rally, this sacred, ritualized event, orchestrated by Jesus and his followers, as they enter the great city Jerusalem, the capitol city of Judah, the place of the Temple, the religious center for all Judaism. And it is here that Jesus has come to do his work. And what is that work? In Luke, Jesus has been setting his gaze on Jerusalem and the Temple throughout the whole second half of his ministry. In Luke, unlike the other gospels, the Temple is seen in a positive light. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, the first place he goes to is the Temple, where as in all the gospels, he drives out those who are involved in the commercialization of it, he *"cleanses"* the Temple. But Luke's description

of this is so lacking in detail, unlike the other accounts, because it is not meant to be a statement against the Temple itself, not a sign of its future demise and destruction. Rather, Jesus cleanses the Temple in order that it might be as it should be, *"a house of prayer."* He is preparing it to be his place of teaching. And Luke will tell us that in the following days, Jesus and his disciples will be in the Temple teaching, even while others plot to destroy him.

So, when the Pharisees, hear his disciples chanting their slogans and singing their psalms of praise, shouting their *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!"*, they are concerned. They may be afraid that this whole thing he is doing may get out of hand. This could upset those who are really in charge, the Roman governor, the ruling authorities, leading to a crack down on the Passover festivities, which could enflame the masses to riot, which would lead only to a tragic end! They come running up to Jesus to tell him to stop this parade, stop his followers from rousing the crowds, telling him to shut them up! And his reply, again only found in Luke's gospel, is *"I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out!"*

This scene is done especially well I think, in the rock opera, *"Jesus Christ Superstar."* Here, the High Priest Caiaphas says to Jesus, *"Tell the rabble to be quiet we anticipate a riot, this common crowd is much too loud. Tell the mob who sing your song that they are fools and they are wrong, they are a curse, they should disperse."* And to that Jesus answers, *"Why waste your breath moaning at the crowd? Nothing can be done to stop their shouting. If every tongue was stilled the noise would still continue. The rocks and stones themselves would start to sing!"*

What we are supposed to hear here in Luke, is that this is an event of such magnitude, this Palm Sunday procession, is of such importance that all creation is somehow involved in what is transpiring. We might even read into this whole scenario, that even as Jesus foretells the destruction of this place that seems unwilling

to do or learn what it takes for peace, and says that a day will come when not one stone will be left upon another (Lk.19:44), that at that very same time, he is already constructing the foundation of another building, a spiritual Temple we might say, with rocks which are those who have come with him to Jerusalem, those who have become his followers, his disciples, those willing to voice their praise and commit their lives to him and to his way. His way of peace.

***"I tell you,
if these were silent,
the very stones
would cry out!"***

So, it's Palm Sunday. Are you here? Do you picture yourself in this story? Today, we can make a choice to be as silent as stones, stones that keep us from following in the way of peace and of Jesus' path of self-giving and sacrificial love for others. Stones like those we have been speaking of this Lenten season, that are obstacles, that hinder us from opening up to the Spirit of God in our midst. Or we can choose to continue on this sacred journey that we've been on as we follow Jesus into Jerusalem, into the Temple, where we with all those that have come to follow him, will shout his praise, will gather, will listen, and will learn from him. Even as he makes his way toward the cross.

We have an opportunity to be present with Jesus now and in this coming week, to become vocal, to be willing to lift our voices, to follow in the way, to go on to eat that last supper with him on Thursday, to watch him be tortured and hung on the cross on Friday, and to persevere with his disciples until we gather again Sunday morning. Where as we find a stone rolled away from a tomb, we might begin to actually hear the stones beneath our feet and all of creation, shout out the amazing and wondrous love of God in our midst! Amen.