



Broad Street Presbyterian Church

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“Shouting Stones”

Luke 19:28-41

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In Israel, stones are everywhere. Pebbles, rocks, flat stones, sharp stones, big and small stones; stones in the countryside, stones in the city. Jacob used a stone for a pillow the night he dreamed of a ladder. David killed Goliath with five smooth stones. Herod built the Temple out of huge stone blocks. Today Jesus is only a few days away from dying, on a stone outcropping called Golgotha. A stone tomb awaits him, sealed by another huge stone, rolled into place. In life and in death, stones surround Jesus.

In Luke's gospel, stones have a job – to speak up about the truth they have witnessed. Luke says if disciples stop praising God, stones will shout out. Shouting stones. It's a wonderful image.

On Palm Sunday, stones have a job to do: an uncontainable truth to proclaim. If only stones could talk. They'd cry out, “See the man on the donkey? Bet on him. He's the one. Follow him.” Creation can hardly keep silent. Even stones, this elemental part of God's creation, have a story to tell. “Stop the people's shouting,” says Jesus, “and you'll hear it all the more from the stones.”

Sometimes, we wish the stones would speak for us. We leave church on Sunday with hosannas on our lips. But kids get sick, parents have a crisis. We face new, unexpected challenges. From Sunday to Sunday, life happens and we forget hosannas, we lose our voices. During the week, between Sundays, we wish stones could shout out for us.

We are faithful and also fickle. We get distracted. We get stressed and anxious. But mostly, we forget we are God's. We're committed, but we turn our backs on our ideals. We abandon God. But God does not abandon us.

This Lent we have been practicing letting go of things that get in the way of that truth, things that separate us from God. We have practiced letting go of worry and fear, judgment and selfishness. Even as I name these things, I am aware of how good it feels to release them on a Sunday morning, and how later, sometimes that same afternoon, I pick them right back up again! Especially worry and its cousin, control. It is so easy to respond out of old patterns. We know from experience that all is not right; within ourselves and in the world.

This Lent we have been growing in things that bring us closer to God. We have practiced growing in trust as an antidote to worry. As the day begins, I can invite God to companion me through the hours ahead. As the day ends, I can take time to remember people and circumstances, and serendipities, what was life-giving, what was not; where I struggled, where I felt joy. I can thank God for the day. Even when I worry, being mindful, being thankful, helps grow my trust in God.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus symbolically declares himself Israel's king. He acts out an ancient prophecy from Zechariah, that one day a peaceful king will come, riding on a donkey. It's no surprise that peace is on his mind. When Jesus enters Jerusalem during Passover, he steps into a volatile, political scene. Passover excites

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patriotism because it remembers back to God's triumph during the Exodus, over Pharaoh and Egypt, the greatest superpower of the known world. Passover stirs a desire for revolution.¹

On Palm Sunday, Jesus places himself in a dangerous situation as a potential disrupter of the Roman peace. Of course, this false peace is hardly peaceful. Pontius Pilate would have ridden into Jerusalem on a warhorse, surrounded by soldiers with swords.

Compared with Pilate's grand entrance, the sight of a donkey makes the scene look a bit ridiculous. Jesus, a full-grown man, astride a half-wild donkey colt, surrounded by peasants and tax collectors. They don't carry swords. All they have are cloaks off their backs. They throw these down to make a path for the Prince of Peace.

These people know Jesus well. His teachings nourish them; his love is healing them. Today they celebrate Jesus. The path down the Mount of Olives descends at a steep angle. Jesus sits on the donkey. His feet brush the ground. He sees the whole city of Jerusalem spread out before him.

"...if these disciples are silent, the stones will shout out." If disciples can't express their joy, God will provide the world with another witness, because truth cannot be silenced. Even rocks will cry out. Even speechless stones will give witness to God's glory.²

Truth cannot be contained or suppressed. The truth will out. Silencing truth doesn't make it any less true. In the worst days of apartheid, truth kept hope alive. When the civil rights movement filled jail cells, the flame of truth burned bright.

I want to tell you about a light that burned bright here in Columbus. His name was Rubén Castilla Herrera. He died a week ago Saturday. Herrera was an area activist. He worked with a wide variety of social justice movements. The Columbus Sanctuary Collective, Black Lives Matter, Central Ohio Workers, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, LGBTQ rights and the rights of refugees.

Yesterday Columbus remembered him during a march – a parade – from the Ohio Statehouse to nearby Broad Street United Methodist Church.

Herrera moved people, with words and ideas, and with his empathy for immigrants. He told this story during an interview:

Yesterday, we were with this older man who was stopped by a police officer... This man was scared because he got a driving ticket and he was literally scared for his life. ... His cry was one of, 'What am I going to do?'

Herrera continues,

¹ Michael Joseph Brown, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2801

² Fred B. Craddock, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

Even as a person with *papeles* [papers], I'm feeling that way...I want to ask, 'What do I do?' In these times, more and more ... you see it just walking down the street. It's not just immigrants. It's poor white people; people addicted to some kind of drug. 'What do I do?' They ask it in different ways. ... I think once you're in tune to that, there's no way you can untune it."³

Herrera saw truth in ordinary moments, and spoke out about those truths in this community. He was not only a light, but a living stone, who spoke the truth he witnessed. Today we give thanks to God for the life of Rubén Castilla Herrera.

Not all of us can speak out like he did. Some have been silenced by circumstance. Others are exhausted, bone tired. Some suffer from what has been called 'contention fatigue,' worn out by the contentiousness around us. For those of us who can speak, that is our job, to be living stones. Jesus tells Pharisees that if disciples are silent, stones will shout out. Whether it's people or pebbles doing the shouting, their witness would be the same.

Truth will out. This week will put that conviction to the test. Because this week truth will be crucified. Today Jesus sees danger coming. But he doesn't change course. This week, under pressure, he will be brave and faithful. This week, under pressure, his disciples will falter. They will fail Jesus, and themselves. One friend will betray another. Ordinary people will do mean things. Political powers will mock and execute a wise, compassionate teacher in an exceptionally cruel way. In Holy Week, hopes get dashed against hard stones. Truth gets crucified.

And yet... the stones of Christ's church still stand, with Jesus as the cornerstone. I've been thinking about what truths these stones might shout out to us:

Be brave.

Practice letting go of what separates you from God.

Speak out.

Stand firm in the Gospel of love and justice to which we have been called.

Name nationalism and classism, and sexism and racism for what they are.

Tune in to the destructive realities of homophobia and Islamophobia.

Risk speaking out against the powers and principalities of our time.

Continue the mission Jesus began in his.

As Holy Week starts, we shout out "Hosanna!" to the One who builds peace among us. This is how we welcome Jesus. Let's see where this week leads. And let's speak out about the truth that is in us. We disciples are part of a long line of living stones. When we speak out, stones won't need to shout. Amen.

³ <https://www.columbusalive.com/obituaries/20190410/obituary-rubn-castilla-herrera-trust-circle>