

Sermon

Full to the Brim — Even the Stones Cry Out

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, April 10, 2022

Palm Sunday

Prayer for Illumination:

Lord God, you are the one who creates by speech. “In the beginning,” we read that you said “Let there be light — and there was light.” From age to age you have been the God who speaks to us of an alternative to the allegiances which enslave us:

- † Providing the Law by Moses at Sinai**
- † Providing correction via the prophets in exile**
- † Speaking to us as Christ - giving voice to the gospel.**

We are mindful of your invitation to join you in the noble work of creating a workable human community:

- † Speaking truth to power**
- † Offering reconciliation in a world of hostility**
- † Uttering blessings in a world prone to curses**

There will always be those who would prefer that we remain silent — so we are glad for the reminder this day that even if we were unable or unwilling to speak of your good news, the very stones themselves would begin to bear witness to your redemption.

So we are here ready to listen! Speak yet again of your inclination to benevolence, of your long-suffering patience,

and of your power made perfect in weakness. We ask it in the name of the “king who comes in the name of the Lord!” Amen.

Luke 19:28 After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

Luke 19:29 When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30 saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31 If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” 32 So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33 As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34 They said, “The Lord needs it.” 35 Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36 As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37 As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, 38 saying,

*“Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!”*

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40 He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

- I. We have arrived at Jerusalem!**
 - A. Throughout the last 6 weeks we have been following Jesus on his inevitable trek to Jerusalem.**
 - B. He has been making his way steadily to the city of peace**
 - 1. Jerusalem — “holy city in ancient Palestine, from Hebrew *Yerushalayim*, literally “foundation of peace,”**

[from base of *yarah* "he threw, cast" + *shalom* "peace."]

- C. How sadly ironic that the Prince of Peace would meet such a violent end in the city of peace.**
- D. But that is Friday's story not today's.**

BTW, let me make a pastoral appeal to you about Holy Week.

51 weeks a year we Presbyterians have it pretty simple. Worship is confined largely to the Lord's Day and (apart from an occasional Ash Wednesday or Christmas Eve) you are left with the other days of the week to do what you like.

Not so in Holy Week! One week a year we recognize the profound depth of the story we are trying to tell — and so we slow down our telling and the space out our worship so that each element of the narrative is given its due.

I urge you — for your own sake — do not leap from the triumphal entry of this morning to the celebration of Easter without journeying with Jesus and his disciples through the rest of the story! You will absolutely empty Easter of its power and impact if you do that.

So, this one week of the year, set aside your typical plans and dedicate yourself to an earnest engagement with the story of Holy week.

Come to the Maundy Thursday service and receive communion.

Though we are not offering a worship service on Friday, spend some time on Good Friday considering carefully the story of the passion.

And on Holy Saturday, I invite you to watch the brief video I'll post about the reality of Jesus in the tomb.

Your worship planning team and many others have worked very hard to ensure that these services are rich in meaning and are well-worth your time and effort to attend. So come!

So . . . back to today and the triumphal entry.

II. We are meant to notice that this is like a *king's coronation day*.

A. All the synoptic gospels cast this moment in the format of Zechariah 9 where the King rides in on a donkey.

B. Why a donkey and not a horse?

1. The horse was a vehicle of war — the Abrams-tank of its day.

2. The donkey was an animal of peace — more like a tractor or a Prius than a tank.

C. To ride in on a horse is what conquering kings do.

D. To ride in on a donkey is to signal that you come in peace with the intention of peaceful prosperity.

- III. The crowds of disciples knew just what to do...**
- A. lay cloaks down to form a pathway for the “one who comes in the name of the Lord!”**
 - B. The Messiah — the anointed one — was the *king*.**
 - 1. *This is a political title - not a spiritual one.***
 - 2. They are providing the kind of parade that signaled the inauguration of a new king.**
 - C. They cry, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”**
 - D. Pharisees present, no doubt sense the danger of this activity, and urge him to silence his supporters.**
 - E. “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”**

So I am left to wonder — What might the stones of Jerusalem say?

- IV. My experience with the stones of Jerusalem.**
- A. First in 1993 as an archeological trip.**
 - B. Again in 1995 and then 2018 on pilgrimage.**
 - C. Every time I had both Jews and Palestinians showing me some old rock they’d dug up and trying to make the argument that their rock was older and therefore they were there first and thus the city was theirs.**
 - D. Only rarely did I encounter holy people like Naim Ateek (a Palestinian Christian) who suggested that the basis for living in the holy land must be a commitment to peace and justice for everyone.**
 - E. When in Jerusalem, the stones are everywhere.**

- V. Stones that have a tale to tell. (I learned from Max Miller)**
- A. Stones dating 3500 years back before Christ to the Chalcolithic age - structures around the spring at Gihon.**
 - 1. Which is to say stones organized around the source of life which is water in that arid region.**
 - B. And other stones from the Bronze age**
 - 1. First dwellings**
 - 2. Then by 1800 BCE a wall protecting the city.**
 - 3. Which is to say stones organized around the needs of creating a workable human community.**
 - C. Stones from the early Iron age when the Jebusites conquered the city and moved the stones to build their own temples and dwellings and streets.**
 - D. And stones placed in the late Iron age too (the time of King Solomon and his huge Temple-building projects)**
 - 1. New stones - the size of a bus - quarried and moved to form the base of the Temple.**
 - 2. Countless other smaller Stones either quarried or “borrowed” from other buildings to build up the Temple complex.**
 - 3. Which is to say stones toppled and laid for religious purposes.**
 - E. And stones from the 8th century when the Assyrians devastated the region in their violent occupation. And again in the 6th century when the Babylonians did the same all over again - but added the destruction of the Temple.**
 - 1. Which is to say stones spattered with the blood of violent regime-change**

- F. And stones from the 5th century when the exiles returned and under Nehemiah's leadership they set about rebuilding the temple by gathering up the toppled stones and using them yet again.**
- 1. Which is to say stones scattered by violence, gathered and re-used to create community again.**
- G. Stones of the 4th through 1st centuries BCE which saw the coming and going of:**
- 1. Alexander the Great**
 - 2. The Ptolemaic (Egyptians) & Seleucid (Syrian) empires.**
 - 3. The Hasmoneans**
 - 4. The capture of Jerusalem by Pompey**
 - 5. And the arrival of Herod and his troops.**
 - 6. Which is to say stones who watched the coming and going of numerous new kings of conquest - each promising a version of "peace" which was accomplished at the end of a sword.**

VI. Given the chance to speak on the day of the Triumphant entry I wonder what these stones might say?

- A. I suspect that they would say something like this:**
- 1. For nearly 4000 years you people have been using and re-using us to build and destroy one another's city.**
 - 2. We've seen seasons of peace, yes, but we've known many more seasons of tumult:**
 - a. razed to the ground twice**
 - b. besieged dozens of times**
 - c. occupied even more times!**

3. We were originally quarried to be a “foundation of peace” *yarah + shalom*.
 4. It is not too late to live into the hope in which we were originally hewn and placed atop one another.
- B. But apart from Justice - there can be no peace.**
1. Your own scripture teaches you that:

Deut. 16:20 Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

- C. Today you have a king who comes in peace to establish a kingdom of peace.**
1. And we rejoice with you!
- D. But take care that your “peace” doesn’t morph into simply another kind of violence.**
1. When you pray for peace remember that you are praying that your enemies be your friends - that their needs are just as urgent as your needs.
- E. I suspect that what the stones of the city of peace would say is that there are no private arrangements for peace —**
1. there will never be enough money and guns to secure a private enclave for peace when others
 - † have no justice and
 - † no access to economic equity.
- F. I suspect that they would warn us that we have a habit of externalizing our conflict and assuming that the struggles is and should be with other**

people . . . when in truth, the most honest struggle is the one within — where we acknowledge that:

- 1. We know the demands of the gospel Jesus brings . . .**
- 2. But we are resistant to do what he asks.**

VII. So as we enter into Holy Week with Jesus and disciples

- A. Let us listen to the stones of Jerusalem**
- B. That we may join Christ as ambassadors of the peace he came to establish.**