

Shouting Stones©**Isaiah 50:4-9a; Philippians 2:5-11****Palm Sunday****Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates**

Today, on this Palm Sunday, we remember Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey. He had sent some of his disciples ahead to tell this man who owned the donkey and his colt that the Lord needs the colt. Somehow “the Lord needs it” seems to have been enough, because when they arrived and told the owner, he gave them the requested colt.

And that lowly animal is the one who ushered Jesus into the city as he, although entering with much praise and joy, quickly found himself confronted with those who wanted him killed.

I can't help thinking about the charge to the pastor, Reverend Glenn Grant gave to me on the day I was installed to be your pastor here at Holly. At every installation, someone gives a charge to the congregation and one to the pastor.

I've heard many charges and have had few given to me, but the one Rev. Grant gave to me was the one I've never forgotten.

He just very politely said to me: “Remember, you're the donkey.”
I'm the donkey? That's not a nice to say. Calling me a donkey?

But it was the only charge to a pastor I've ever remembered.
“You're not Jesus.” He reminded me. “As a pastor, you aren't expected to be Jesus. You are the donkey who ushered Jesus in to the people.”

It's a great, unforgettable metaphor, isn't it? It was the donkey who ushered Jesus into the city of Jerusalem that day as they began the week for Passover.

And the people were excited. It reminds us a little of how the people come out and line the streets to honor a war hero. These people had heard of the amazing teaching and miraculous healings Jesus had done and they were thrilled to have the moment.

They threw down their coats for Jesus to ride over and they waved palm branches in honor of him. The more the excitement built, the more it grew. They were hoping for the long-awaited Messiah and they thought this Jesus just might be him.

Luke calls these people disciples, but they aren't the twelve who Jesus called to work with him – at least most were not. These were people who had witnessed Jesus' miracles and had come to believe in him. And they were shouting, louder and louder:

“Hosanna! Hosanna! (Praise! Praise him!) Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

The Pharisees and religious leaders were already noticing how the people were flocking to Jesus. They were losing control and power because of this man. They were already out to kill him, especially after he had just recently raised his friend Lazarus from death to life.

If Jesus could do that, he would soon have the crowds complete devotion and they – the religious rulers - would have no authority at all. Which, by the way, could be trouble with the relationship and freedom they enjoyed with the Roman government who ruled over them. If they could not control their own Jewish people, then the Romans would have to do it for them – all of them.

So, the Pharisees told Jesus to calm the people down; to make the crowds stop shouting.

And Jesus said, “I tell you, even if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Think about that for a minute. Stones shouting praises for the Son of God, the King of glory. The One who comes in the name of the Lord. In the face of hatred and oppression there were people who had the courage to shout praises to Jesus. And they were oppressed and could have been run down on the spot. But no, they were “in your face” with those whom they already knew had it in for Jesus.

And Jesus says even if there was no one praising him, the very stones of the earth would be shouting. We often sing that great song from the psalm about the trees of the field clapping their hands in praise.

Paul says in the Philippians text we just read “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and *under the earth*, even those who have been dead and buried) ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

And Jesus is saying that all creation – even the stones – will shout praises; even if no human ever praised him, God’s creation would.

While Luke doesn’t say (in the passage we read together in the Call to Worship) that people were waving palm branches, other gospel writers do say they were. Luke specifically says they were spreading their garments on the pathway for Jesus. This was an extravagant act of devotion for people who had very little.

Can you imagine how Peter, and the other twelve, felt as they came into the city, finding this amazing show of honor and excitement? Remember, they had heard Jesus – not once but three times – say that he was going to Jerusalem where he would be arrested and would suffer at the hands of Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea; that he would be killed. But on the third day he would rise again.

Peter had argued with him, not wanting to believe it. But how fearful they must have been, entering Jerusalem, knowing Jesus had said these things were going to happen.

But now, here are people – quite a lot of people – who are worshipping Jesus. I wonder if they thought for a little while that maybe things would be okay after all. Maybe this parade was a sign that things would turn around and go in a different, more positive way than what Jesus had said.

And I wonder how Jesus felt, don't you? Jesus really did know what was coming; he had foretold it three times to his closest friends – his disciples. But I wonder if, just for this moment, he might have had a small glimmer of hope that it might go different.

I kind of doubt it myself, because he knew what he had come to earth for all along. Yet, he was human and it would be natural to want to hope, in a moment of this kind of honor and praise, that maybe it could be different.

Oh, but the religious rulers were hot. They were getting very nervous now with the crowds gone crazy. They would have to do something – and the sooner the better. And they began plotting the way.

But what do you think about the crowd? I wonder if all the people who were shouting Hosanna that day were really, truly doing it with sincere praise. Or, would they just catching the energy and excitement?

When I was 26, I had an opportunity to go to an Elvis Presley concert in Tulsa, Oklahoma a year before the king of rock died. I actually won three tickets on the radio so I took two of my friends. We could not sit together and my seat was not in the front of the stage but was supposedly a backstage seat.

However, I was right on the isle where Elvis entered. If I had arms that were twice as long, I could have touched him. It's a wonder I wasn't pushed over the edge and dropped right on top of him. The crowd was absolutely wild – pushing and screaming at the top of their lungs! I'd never experienced anything quite like it.

I had never understood the screaming and fainting I saw on television when the Beatles came to the Ed Sullivan show for the first time. I did not understand my 16 year old babysitter crying when she heard Elvis sing, or when he died in a movie.

I liked his songs. A lot. But I wasn't an emotional screamer ...

Until I was at that concert. And suddenly I was. I felt the excitement and the frenzy building until I was carried right into it and found myself screaming like a teeny bopper.

There is something about the energy of a crowd that is contagious. I'm guessing there were probably more and more people that day who began to join in with the first group of people – who were genuine in their praises – who just started joining their voices with the rest.

Everybody loves a parade. Right?

Unfortunately, it was a different story later in the week. By Friday morning Jesus had been arrested just as he had said. He had been on trial. A mockery of a trial.

The crowd was there, outside, waiting to see what was going to happen. And there were enough people who caught that frenzy who started shouting "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

They were given the option of letting one of the two people go who were condemned – Barabbas – who was a rebel, a known rebel rouser against the nation – or Jesus (who was being mimicked as the King of the Jews.)

The people decided to let Barabbas go. How is it that it went from praise to crucifixion? Within a few days? How is it that the crowds were so fickle they were shouting praises on Sunday and *Crucify him* on Friday?

I think it is because we are so easily influenced by those around us, by the culture we know, by the things we hear on the news. Human beings can sure shout words of support and honor but we can turn on a dime with hatred and bullying if it is the popular thing to do. We would like to believe we would never turn. We would like to think we would not be like the crowd – wishy washy to say the least. But we heard last week what Peter did. Peter – one of the closest men to Jesus – was absolutely sure he would never deny or desert Jesus.

Oh, but he did. Denied knowing him three times just as Jesus said he would.

We don't really know what we would do. It's an absolute truth that humanity needed – and still needs today – a Savior. We can do a lot of good things in this world – things that honor Jesus. But the truth is we can't quite get it right. We need our Savior.

And that's why he went on into the darkest week of his life on earth ... because of love and determination to give us salvation..

Can you imagine the loud, deafening silence on that Friday when Jesus hung on the cross? Can you imagine the whole creation weeping with grief? The trees were no longer clapping their hands, the stones were silent in their shouting. The Son of the living God had been put to death. But then, imagine the morning of resurrection – the glorious day when the tomb was found empty. Even before the disciples, or the women, or anyone understood, or believed – the trees of the field must have been clapping their hands to beat the band. And the stones had to have been shouting for joy. Jesus, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, had been resurrected from the dead. He was alive!

God created them, and all creation cries out in praise.

But the last thing I want to remind you of is the stone you took home at the beginning of Lent. It was to remind you of Peter – the one Jesus named “The Rock” whom Jesus built his church on.

It was to remind you that *you* are living stones. Each of us is a living stone – a chip off the old block – so to speak – and we are some of the stones who, as long as we are shouting praises – worshipping our Lord; spreading the good news – we are shouting stones ourselves!

Like Peter we are flawed, imperfect, sinful disciples – but faithful. We have been washed in grace and strengthened for the journey. We have been given a voice to speak of his love, of his death and resurrection; to tell the good news of salvation.

Let us shout it out. *Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.*

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