

## **Stones Shall Shout**

### **Luke 19:28-40**

After he had said this, Jesus kept moving ahead,  
going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany,  
at the hill called the Mount of Olives,  
he sent two of the disciples,  
saying, "Go into the village ahead of you,  
and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt  
on which no one has yet ridden. Untie it and lead it here.  
If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' simply say,  
'Because the Lord has need of it.' "

So those who were sent departed  
and found it as he had told them.

As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them,  
"Why are you untying the colt?"

They said, "Because the Lord has need of it."

Then they brought it to Jesus;  
and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

As he moved along,  
others kept spreading their cloaks on the road.

When he was already close to the descent of the Mount of Olives,  
the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God loudly  
in their joy over all the miracles which they had seen.

They sang out, "Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him,

"Teacher, rebuke your disciples (order your disciples to stop)."  
But he replied, "I tell you, if these grow silent,  
then the stones will shout out."

## **Stones Shall Shout**

Luke 19:28-40

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### **I.**

Palm Sunday, which heralds the start of Easter week is, of course, a really BIG deal. Centuries of human drama will collapse to a mere span of days: hope and glory, kinship and courage, betrayal and hate, death and life. And it all starts here, today, with Palm Sunday, as we begin to consider how much Christ took on for us, the world, and the cosmos. The anguish in the garden, praying that the cup could pass from him. The jeering of the crowd, and the journey's final steps. The betrayal of one friend, and the denial by another. The fear, the pain, the cross, the death. And, finally, the joy of Easter morning's empty tomb.

### **II.**

All of this begins with the ride into Jerusalem, as told to us today in the Gospel of Luke, to demonstrate the fulfillment of the prophecy found in the 9th chapter of Zechariah:

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!*

*Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he,*

*humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

*He shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

Although it is doubtful that the people waving palms and shouting Hosanna on the road into Jerusalem that day would have understood the moment as the fulfillment of Zechariah's 500 year old prophecy, they certainly knew *something* special was happening; and like all people everywhere and in every time, they arrived that day with great expectations.

### **III.**

Such a scene, as is recounted in today's passage, was not any kind of new event to the people of Jerusalem, however. In fact, it was THE way in which those of any standing or status customarily arrived in the city; by making "an entrance" as it were. So, for Jesus to employ the same practice wasn't just a theological statement about his Kingship as the Son of God, it was also

understood, provocatively, as a rebellious political statement. Jesus had long been perceived as a threat to the Jewish religious leaders and their institutions. Now, with his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on the occasion of Passover, Jesus also began to be perceived as threat to the Roman leaders and their occupying government; just as the Sadducees and Pharisees had warned all along. So, it was this dual threat to the religious establishment in combination with the political implications which, almost certainly by design, paved Jesus' way to the cross of Calvary.

#### **IV.**

All of that said, we now arrive at today's quandary, found, here, in the final two verses:

*Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples (order your disciples to stop)." But Jesus replied, "I tell you, if these grow silent, then the stones will shout out."*

Please correct me if I'm wrong, but I operate under the assumption that there isn't even one among us here today, who comes to worship on the Park in order to get spoon-fed easy answers, or to sit for a recitation of the party line, or to reinforce the narrative we already have for ourselves and our world. Instead, we come to this sanctuary to be challenged in our assumptions, to share our heart-ache and pain, to abide our past and find hope for the future, and to dwell within a shared mystery. We gather each Sunday as silent stones now shouting.

#### **V.**

All last week, I've been considering what Jesus meant by his response to the Pharisees, "*if these grow silent, then the stones will shout out.*" Most of us have probably heard or can recall this statement, but, interestingly, not much attention has been paid to this rather evocative image. The body of scholarly work has given it scant attention; only a rare mention as an allusion to the stone being rolled back from the tomb on Easter morning. There is no similar idea in antiquity or the historical record; certainly not in the Hebrew scriptures. I, myself, have glossed over it in 28 years of sermon writing. The internet, that bastion of random thoughts and hair-brained ideas, is strangely mum on the subject; though there is a Christian rock band called The Silent Stones, which is clever in its juxtaposition to The Rolling Stones. For the most part, however, there is nothing.

## VI.

And, yet, Jesus seems to indicate that at a point, there will be *something*. In responding to the Pharisees, Jesus indicates that there is more going on here than meets the eye. That the stage being set is *cosmic* in scope. That the rules normally applied to existence will cease to hold sway. That what is about to unfold will not be a function of human fealty, political posturing or military might. That even stones, ever silent, will soon begin to shout.

Seen in this light, the events of Palm Sunday serve almost as a parody of the truth they portent. What happened that day on the road to Jerusalem was window dressing, bells and whistles; and, in many ways, superfluous. Crowds easily given to clamor are but nothing. In contrast, stones starting to shout herald that the real mystery is afoot.

## VII.

I think all of us carry an assumption of a Palm Sunday faith. We place value on the Christ who rides into our church, and the palms that we might wave as a welcome, are the work we do on God' behalf; our mission, our fellowship and our worship. But, these are as nothing compared to long silent stones which finally begin to shout as each one of us discovers our own voice with which we might speak to God, in our hearts, in our daily lives; to the people we love and to the strangers we meet. There is no sermon I could give which would unlock that voice within you; not on Palm Sunday, or any other Sunday. Such a voice speaks of faith as a mystery seen out of the corner of one's eye which, when focused on too hard, slips from view. A mystery, which at its own insistence, will not be solved, but can only be abided and dwelt within.

## VIII.

Now, that right there is a pretty good Psalm Sunday sermon. At this point, we could certainly all say "Amen" and proceed with the day. Before we do, however, I would like to suggest that there is another question we may wish to consider: what is it that would cause even *stones* to shout? More specifically, what does it *look* like, and what does it *feel* like?

This past Wednesday afternoon I was sitting on a bench up near the chapel on the St. Lawrence University campus. I had arrived a few minutes early to

pick up Janeil, the young Jamaican student we had befriended last Thanksgiving when Linda and I hosted a gaggle of international students for dinner. All winter I've been taking her out driving once a week, but with her Road Test scheduled for a week from tomorrow, we've increased the frequency to twice a week and, now, three times a week. I know, Rev. Mike's School of Driving; except in this instance Janeil is "street legal."

## **IX.**

Though I am loathe to confess it, as I have always considered myself an accomplished Transcendentalist in the spirit of Henry David Thoreau, I must admit that even Walden Pond seem a whole lot better on the first warm, sunny day of spring.

It must have been in-between class times as there were all kinds of students streaming by, and every single one of them had their head up, a smile on their face and a bounce in their step. Moreover, each seemed collectively aware that all of us were feeling the very same way: as if a profound and joyful exuberance had suddenly been loosed upon the world after being held captive for far too long. It was heady and intoxicating, sharpening the senses, energizing the body and lifting the soul. Siting there on that bench, I thought to myself a day such as this would cause even *stones* to shout; and I was shouting right along with them.

## **X.**

While it is a nice, albeit somewhat predictable, analogy to draw between the first warm day of spring and Jesus riding into our lives, the comparison is beside the point. What matters, in each instance, is that there is a look and a feel to this life that we should always be seeking, and welcoming and believing to exist not just "out there" but "in here"; a joyful exuberance ready to be loosed in both the monumental moments and simple seconds of our lives. Sometimes the mighty hand of God is required, more often than not, however, it is really just a matter of untying it from the tether. The Lord has need of it, and so do we. Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Amen.