

Meditation – “A Time to Speak”  
Scripture Reading - Luke 19:28-40  
Palm Sunday, April 14, 2019  
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Our scripture reading is Luke 19:28-40. Throughout Lent we have journeyed with Jesus, beginning with entering the wilderness and now ending with entering Jerusalem. In contrast with the quiet desolation of the wilderness, this entry is marked not only by the noise of the city but also by disciples shouting. “Blessed is the king that comes in the name of the Lord!” For those who had journeyed with Jesus and had a vision of who Jesus would be for them, for those who had been sustained by Jesus’ words along the way; it was a time to speak, and shout and sing! This is the Word of God.

*After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place 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 that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs 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, “The Lord needs it.” Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As Jesus rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 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, saying, “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, order your disciples to stop.” Jesus answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” Amen.*

The title of the meditation: “A Time to Speak”

*The text: Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.’ Luke 19:40*

Let us pray: Holy and Loving God, thank you for the courage and confidence of your children to speak when it is time and for all the times you have sustained us with your word. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

Considered one of the great preachers in the twentieth century, William Sloane Coffin served as chaplain at Yale University before becoming the senior minister of New York City’s Riverside Church in 1976. Dale Rogers, our Director of Music and the Arts, received his Master’s from the Institute of Sacred Music at Yale while Coffin served as chaplain. Coffin was well known as an outspoken advocate for Civil Rights and an eloquent voice opposing the Vietnam War.

He was to be the keynote speaker at the dedication of a sculptor “The Angel of Peace” created by my husband Peter’s father Will for the occasion of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship in Chicago on Veteran’s Day 1999. Peter’s dad and Bill had been classmates at

Yale following World War II. Sadly, Bill suffered a devastating stroke shortly before the event and was unable to attend.

A few years later, on a Friday evening at our home in Clayton Peter and I heard Bill Moyers interview William Sloan Coffin on PBS. We sat in silence and awe listening to this articulate man reach for words as he shared the greatest challenge in his life –the loss of his speech. Following his stroke in 1999, Bill Coffin had to learn how to speak again.

As Coffin approached the end of his life journey, a book including a collection of his words spoken over a lifetime of sermons and speeches was published. The title of the book Credo – means “I believe” or as Coffin suggested, is best translated “I have given my heart to.” It was the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ that William Sloane Coffin gave his heart.

American author and journalist James Carrol wrote the preface of Credo and shares this story. The year was 1972 and James Carroll found himself in a jail cell following an anti-war protest in Washington D.C. He writes about his disorientation, depression, and fear the night he spent behind bars...he called it the dark night of the soul and describes the sinking feeling he experienced as a large stone falling in the well of his chest. He was speechless and devastated. Then a word sustains his weary spirit. And I quote:

*Even now you have no idea what prompted him to do so, but as some point in the night, the man in the next cell began to sing, softly at first. His resolute baritone gradually filled the air as he moved easily into the lyric of what you soon recognized as Handel’s Messiah: “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.” And then you recognized the voice as that of William Sloane Coffin. He had been the spokesman at the Capital demonstration you attended.*

*Now Coffin sang as if he were alone on the earth, and the old words rose through the dark as if Isaiah himself has returned to speak for you to God—to speak for God to you. Others in the cellblock soon joined their voices: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.”*

*As you listened “And we like sheep, and we like sheep, and we like sheep—have gone astray”—you suddenly felt awash in an unexpected gratitude, for you realized that those words expressed your deepest faith. And that sung as they were, those words had an absolute integrity that far transcended your fearful hesitance. You did believe that your Redeemer liveth, and, more than that, you believed that your Redeemer had stood upon the earth with you, bringing you to that most unlikely place. You saw, indeed, that you belonged there, in that cellblock, and that you were plenty strong enough for whatever lay ahead. (pause)*

Weary and disillusioned, James Carroll had heard a word, a creed, a song to sustain his spirit. Belief gives us the confidence not only to speak truth to power in love but the courage to live a life that speaks to the power of Christ’s love.

The prophet Isaiah recalls a time during Israel’s exile when the suffering servant speaks. *The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word...(Isaiah 50:4)*

According to theologian James Newsome: To “sustain” does not mean simply to speak a gentle word of consolation. It means...to speak a reality that counters the weariness, an alternative way to see the world, which creates space, freedom, and energy.

In exile it was the word that it is Yahweh who governs and not the debilitating power structure of the empire. And so, a word to sustain the weary is a theological assertion giving voice to new possibilities outside the assumed realities that dominate and inviting the weary to change the way they see themselves, and therefore, the way they live their lives.

Such a daring theological assertion is sure to evoke resistance and hostility from those in power. In Isaiah, when that word was met with hostility, the suffering servant responds with peaceable nonresistance.

*I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord GOD helps me; therefore, I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; God who vindicates me is near. (Isaiah 50:5b-8a)*

For the suffering servant, it is a time to keep silent. Ironically the silence speaks volumes about the confidence the suffering servant has in Yahweh. It is not a coincidence that Christians around the world reference this suffering servant passage every Palm Sunday as we commemorate the beginning of Holy Week.

Throughout his ministry, Christ spoke a word to sustain the weary, not simply a word of consolation but a new reality of how to view oneself and the world. When the disciples welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with words of praise and gratitude for changing the way they viewed the world, those who had grown accustomed to the way things were had heard enough.

*Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop."*

It was a time to speak and Jesus would not and could not silence the good news. Jesus also knew that the good news would provoke resistance and hostility from those in power.

Christ—the suffering servant met the hostility of the world with peaceful nonresistance and in so doing revealed not only the cruelty of our ways but also the mystery of God's ways—whose love is stronger than the hatred of the world. The God to whom we belong in life and in death is the God who conquered death by dying on a cross.

*Jesus answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.'*

A Time to Speak...Thanks be to God. Amen.