

Meditation – “Shouting Stone”
Scripture Reading - Luke 19:28-40
Palm Sunday, April 10, 2022
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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 who 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: “Shouting Stone”

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, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

As Jesus’ ministry culminates with his entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday prior to the last supper, trial, crucifixion and resurrection, the crowds welcome him with praise and adoration. “Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.” When some of the Pharisees ask Jesus to order them to stop, Jesus’ response is a poignant reminder of a truth we have witnessed throughout history; namely, that people’s voices ultimately cannot be silenced, stifled, or suppressed.

Following the bitter debate in 1787 over the ratification of the United States Constitution, James Madison among others sought to improve the document by proposing its first ten amendments now known as the Bill of Rights. The Enlightenment themes of liberty, toleration, and reason would lead our founders to put forth the first and foremost right as free speech. The education of the people, the public debate of ideas, and the open criticism of leadership are essential to a healthy democracy. Over the years, when authorities within our imperfect democracy have tried to silence people’s cry for a greater justice, it has often made their voices stronger and more determined as we have witnessed through the courageous and faithful speech of the Boston Tea Party, the Child Labor Reform, the abolitionists, the suffragettes, the Freedom Riders, and the advocates for our LGBTQ siblings.

This year our sojourn to Holy Week has been colored by the Russian invasion as we have witnessed a ruthless attempt by a dictator to silence and annihilate the beautiful and resilient people of Ukraine. The shouts of people and governments around the world who stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in the Ukraine, through economic sanctions and generous support of the people fleeing their country, speak to the truth of Jesus’ words the day he entered Jerusalem. Additionally, the stones in the path of all those forcibly removed from their homes, the stones of the rubble of war, and the stones under the feet of the refugees leave a trail of voices that will long proclaim the injustice these people have persevered with dignity and grace.

The stones will cry out! Luke’s gospel alone records these faith-filled words of Christ. *I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.* Here is faith in the sure triumph of God. Here is a truth too good to have its mouth shut. It may be temporarily silenced, but not for long. If disciples fall away by cowardice or complacency, God will raise up more! As John the Baptist said in his message by the Jordan: *God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.* (Luke 3:8)

As the prophet Ezekiel spoke to the disheartened exiled children of Abraham in the sixth century BCE: *“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”* (Ezekiel 36:26)

In the prophet Isaiah we learn that the new spirit is given through the tongue of a teacher in the words of the suffering servant: *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 the Babylonian exile the Suffering Servant’s word of sustenance conveyed it is Yahweh who governs and not the debilitating power structure of the empire. And so, a word to sustain the weary is the theological assertion that gives voice to new possibilities outside the repressive realities and invites 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 hostility from those in power, both then and now.

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. It is not a coincidence that Christians around the world reference this suffering servant passage in Isaiah every Palm Sunday as the disciples welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with words of praise and gratitude for changing the way they viewed the world. It was a time to speak, shout, and sing. 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 the world’s 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.’ Thanks be to God. Amen.