

"The Rocks Shout Out"

Palm Sunday Sermon

Pastor Rich Knight

Trinitarian Congregational Church

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Luke 19:28-40

At the end of this chapter Luke tells us that the crowds who heard Jesus speak were "spellbound" by his teaching (19:48). One of the techniques that Jesus used to arrest peoples' attention as well as help them remember his teachings was he used very picturesque speech. For example: "Don't worry about the speck in your brother's eye. Worry about the log that coming out of your own eye." If you heard that just once you'd probably remember it. "Judge not, lest you too be judged." Same thing. "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich person to get into heaven." Memorable. Picturesque. And a bit shocking. There's a line in the Palm Sunday account that fits into this category. Let's take a look:

Luke 19:28-40

After he 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 he 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." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

I think that last line of that passage is quite picturesque: *"I tell you, if these people were silent, the stones would shout out!"* Some of the religious leaders in the crowd were disturbed that Jesus was receiving such attention and adoration from the crowd on that first Palm Sunday. So they called on Jesus to silence his followers. He replies, *"If these people were to be silent, these stones at the side of the road would shout out!"*

You know we go about our daily lives and we don't constantly see rocks and stones everywhere. We have nicely manicured lawns and parks, and well-made streets and sidewalks. But of course in the First Century things were not well-groomed like they are today. Rocks were everywhere, especially along the side of the road, where they had been placed when the road was built. Jesus is saying to the Pharisees, *"What's happening here today - the long-awaited Messiah riding into the Holy City - is so spectacular that if the people weren't praising God the rocks themselves would be forced to shout 'Hosanna in the Highest!'"*

Such a memorable line - no wonder it ended up in the Gospel account. It may also have been a challenge to the Pharisees to soften their hard hearts. *"God can make these very stones cry out. So soften your hearts and let them offer praise for what God is doing."*

In a sense there was a message in the rocks - soften your hearts. Don't let them be hard as stone. It's not the first time in Jesus' life and ministry that there was a message that came through rocks and stones.

A. Many of you are familiar with the Temptation accounts in the Gospels.

Following his Baptism Christ was led out into the wilderness, where he was tempted by the Evil One. He was tempted to submit to him in order to gain great power - *"I'll give you all the kingdoms of the world if you*

bow down and worship me." Christ was tempted to gain great popularity by throwing himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and then saving himself at the last minute. And, he was tempted to give up his fasting by turning the stones of the wilderness into bread. But Jesus said, *"One does not live by bread alone."* And the rocks remained rocks, and in doing so they shouted out a message - This One, the anointed One, has come to be obedient to God. As Paul would write to the Philippians - He was *"obedient, even unto the point of death."* (Phil. 2:8) The rocks shouted out, *"Obedience!"*

B. There's another story in the Gospels where stones were prominent and they shouted out a message. The Woman caught in Adultery - in John 8.

They bring her to Jesus. They appear ready to stone her. But Jesus says that now famous line, *"Let he who is without sin cast the first stone."* And one by one they put down their stones and walk away; and all that's left is Jesus, the Woman and a lot of rocks everywhere. Jesus tells the woman, *"I'm not here to condemn you. I'm all about second chances and fresh starts. Go and sin no more."* And the stones on the ground came with a message. They shouted out the word, *"Grace"* - God's Love and Forgiveness for imperfect people like you and me. The rocks shouted out, *Grace!*

C. Last week we looked at another story involving a stone. It had to do with an event that occurred about a week before Palm Sunday. Jesus shows up at what we would call a cemetery. His dear friend Lazarus has been dead for 4 days. He's in the tomb, which was a cave with a large stone rolled in front of it to seal it up. Jesus breaks down and sobs when he arrives upon the scene. He sees the grief and suffering that sickness and death have caused. Then Jesus shouts out, *"Take away the stone."* The stone is moved from the entrance of the tomb, and as St. John so delicately puts it, *"The dead man came out."*

The stone had a message - *Jesus raises us to New Life* - for this life and not just for the life to come. The stone is a reminder that we can break free from the things that entomb us - resentments, bitterness, guilt, shame, greed, and much more. Christ came to *"set the captives free"* as he once said. He came to give us *"life, and life abundantly."* He came to give us more life, not less, more hope, not less, more love, not less.

more joy, not less. He came to breath new life into our sometimes lifeless souls. The stone was a reminder that we are called out of darkness to the light of Christ. We are called out of death to newness of life - for this life, for our lives while we live them upon this earth, not just for the new life of heaven. The new life starts now - that's why Lazarus was raised and came back to life upon this earth. That's was what his stone shouted out - New Life for this life, here and now!

D. Well, there's one more story in the Gospels about a stone. It's a story that's recorded in all four Gospels. It's a story that, if it had not happened we would probably have never even heard about Jesus Christ. But we'll save that story for next week!

Let's close in prayer:

Holy and Loving God, thank you that your truth comes to us in many forms, even through the simplest of things like rocks and branches, and things like bread and the juice of communion. Come to us now and feed us with the Bread of Heaven. Amen.