

If they were silent, even the rocks would shout out

Gracious God, May these words be your words of grace. Amen

“If they were silent, even the rocks would shout out.” Wow, it is hard to imagine a rock shouting anything. We have heard the Psalms tell us – Trees clap for joy - We imagine that in a strong wind. The seas roar – We can imagine a turbulent sea roaring. But rocks shouting! It is hard to imagine, to wrap our heads around....Now if we had a geologist or an archeologist, we might find out how rocks might speak to us; about the era in which they were formed, about the animals, pottery, weather systems of the era. But it is still hard to imagine rocks shouting out. This expression is wonderful because it tells us how desperately, how strongly, Jesus wants the message out.

In that first Palm Parade it was Passover. It was a time of true celebration. Many came from all over to visit the temple. Homes were filled with wonderful aromas as families joined together to remember the story that had been told century after century.

They remembered that they were once slaves in Egypt. Hope was drawn by the memory that God had heard the cries of God’s people. Around the supper table they told the story of their liberation from Egypt. Their children and children’s children needed to hear this story to strengthen their faith during these hard times. For during Jesus’ time they felt like slaves once again – enslaved by the Roman Empire. It was a time of violence, hunger, and desperation. They NEEDED to hear this story of their journey to freedom. They needed to be reminded that God heard their cries. Passover gave them hope. AND the Roman Empire did not like this time of year. They wanted to make sure that no one got the idea to protest or riot. And so during this Passover season a show of force entered Jerusalem. Big beautiful war horses with soldiers in armor arrived. The Hebrew people could celebrate their holiday all they wanted. BUT, the Roman Empire wanted to make sure it wasn’t going to mean anything.

Well, here comes Jesus, NOT in armor, but in a crude robe. He entered Jerusalem, riding a colt or a donkey. He came, NOT to show force. Many think he was showing humility. I think he was making a statement. The purpose of Kingship was about care, peace and justice. Not control. Not force. To be in leadership does not mean that you are free to be self serving, throwing around your power, without any real concern for your people. Violence is not the way to transform the world. Jesus WAS making a statement.

People began to throw cloaks on the ground to usher in the King. Scriptures other than Luke talk about how the people waved palm branches. Historically the waving of the palms was an act of defiance by the people of Israel. They were celebrating Jesus as King, NOT CEASAR. This was not going to make the Roman government happy. The temple leaders were stressed to the max. They had carefully made deals behind closed doors with the Roman Empire to keep the temple doors open, and to stay alive. And here Jesus was about to destroy the delicate balance they had created. “Shhhhh” they said. “Quiet” they said. They did not want to get into trouble. They had promised the Empire quiet. Yes, this was going to be a mess.

Palm Sunday is a day in which we so enjoy watching our children wave palms. We enjoy hearing them sing. It is a joyful day. It is as joyful as that first Palm Parade. People were singing and chanting and praising God. But Palm Sunday has even more depth than that. For it talks about our future and our children's future. This scripture tells us that the Gospel is in fact not only personal, it is also political. Not political in the sense that we debate over whose political party Jesus really does belong to. It is about much, much more. It is about the hard work of Shalom – peace with justice. Hungry people fed, all people treated with dignity, homes that are safe, a future free of bandage. The problem is that the Christian church (universal) has become like the temple officials. We prefer everyone to remain silent because it is just plain easier.

Jesus took a hard road for the sake of God and for us. We can do no less than to take the rocky road for Christ. We want to push down the hard stuff. And focus on people's individual questions about heaven, without focusing on the work that needs to happen on earth. We want the church to be comfortable and NOT prophetic.

But seeing Jesus on that colt with no armor gives us courage. And we are called to loosen the bonds of injustice. DOMA is before the Supreme Court soon. Will we have the courage as joyful, caring and strong Christians to speak for all those who feel that they must remain in the closet.

If not, even the stones will shout out! A "Place at the Table", an outstanding movie about hunger in the U.S. gives us some astounding statistics. One out of every 2 children at some point in their lives will be on food assistance. And yet SNAP (Food Stamps) and WIC are being greatly reduced from our national budget. This is a justice issue. This is a Christian issue. AND it is time for us to be silent no more. In the movie one child found it hard to concentrate in class because she kept on fantasizing about food to eat. Much of our childhood obesity rate can be connected to poverty. It is cheaper to eat at McDonald's than to eat fresh vegetables and fruit.

It is time for us to be silent no more. In our own personal lives we keep secrets because we want to keep up a certain image. But, if we were honest about our lives, we can give others freedom to come out of the darkness of shame. We can break the chains of slavery in our own lives.

It is time to be silent no more.

If we shrink away from God's higher calling – If we fail to speak for God's grace, compassion and justice – JOYFULLY & BOLDLY – The very stones beneath our feet are going to shout out.