

Even the Stones Shout with Praise

Luke 19:28-40

Rev. Nick Hatch

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Will you pray with me?

God of the highest Hosanna lead us to offer your Son our heartfelt praise. As Easter lays stretched out before us, with all its agony and all its glory, the momentous weight of your love is exalted by all of creation. May the words of my mouth and the mediations of our hearts be acceptable to you, oh our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today marks the beginning of Holy week; a rollercoaster of experiences and symbols, rituals and emotions, weeping and praise. Today is Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His arrival ushered in a new age of peace and justice. And all the cloaks spread out, the palm branches waved, and Hosanna's shouted in elation- all belong to a celebration bigger than humanity alone.

Last spring I spent some time in Milwaukee. My family had come there seeking the healing of some of the nation's finest medical help. With heaviness on my heart, I had the day to myself and ended up in Doctors Park. I walked across a large mown meadow gold with dandelions and found a trailhead. A limestone staircase started at the edge of a large cliff. Through the tangle of unleafed oak tree limbs I could see lake Michigan spread out before me like an undulated azure blanket. I descended the hillside which was covered in white trillium and dutchman's britches. Spring beauties with their hints of pink poked their heads between cracks in the stone's walkway.

Once I was on the beach I began walking south; old jetties reached out into the blue waters telling of an industrial past. The beach consisted of the remnants of eroded limestone bluffs: piles of smooth rounded stones which slid and slipped underneath. Seagulls circled overhead. And the light breeze washing over me steadily brought in waves sweeping far up on the beach. The water would crash and wash up, then countless tumbling stones would race back down chasing themselves out to sea. On such a bright and beautiful day, it was clear Lake Michigan was celebrating the changing of the seasons, as she shouted her praise through the crash-shuuuhhhh, crash -shuhhh, crash-shuhhhhhh: of water on stone.

The resonance was like prayer.

Then something caught my eye. I headed down the beach to piles of beautiful deep red rocks. They looked like my pillow after a poor shaving incident! I knelt down and picked up this rock which had been warmed by the sun- and I realized it was not a rock- but you could barely tell its origin. It was once a brick. In this stretch a large dumping of bricks had become something different. These stones sang their own song unlike anywhere else on the beach. It was deeper, sharper, livelier.

What was once a human-made resource built for industrialization; creation had worn into something beautiful. Once square and sharp, now was smooth and rolled up and down the beach- singing its own form of praise.

We are gathered here today: to sing our own form of praise. And when we cannot offer our praise, creation will praise for us.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, he rounded a bend in the road and is overcome. The city lay spread out before him and it makes him weep.

“Jerusalem! If only today you knew the things that make for peace, but you do not know them, they are hidden from your eyes.”

Jesus words must have felt oddly contradictory to his disciples in what would immediately become an atmosphere of elation. His calling, his pleading, his wish to herald true peace on earth echoes against the chilling events of the week that follow.

But this is no surprise to today. Jesus tears often came from a place that is hidden from us. His is a compassion so deep, a devotion to God so sharp and a hope so much livelier than anything we could embody.

As Jesus enters the city, his words immediately begin to fulfill scripture. He tells his two disciples they are to go to a nearby village and there they will find a colt who has never been ridden. When asked why, he simply responds “The Lord needs it.” And the disciples do as they have been told. When they return, they place blankets on the colt. In so doing the prophecies of Zachariah are fulfilled while the crowds sing the words of Psalm 118:26 “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord”.

It is as if Jesus has the power to predict future events.

Deeply unnerved by the parallels of scriptures past, present and future- the pharisees flexed their muscle in their petition to Jesus to silence the crowd.

“Teacher” they said, “order your disciples to stop.”

Order them. Command them. Mandate them- to stop- the pharisees say.

We do not know the motivations of the Pharisees. Perhaps they were worried the moment was too political and feared the retaliation of the imperial empire. Perhaps they disagreed Jesus was the Messiah. We don’t know the motivation, but any religious figure who was worth their scriptural salt knew what was coming. And their desire was clear.

They did not want prior prophecies to legitimate the moment. They did not want the joy of the crowds or scripture to be sung to validate the king of kings. They did not welcome the definitive event of the crucifixion and resurrection.

Contradicting their faithfulness to God, they wanted God to stop speaking, the faithful to stop praising, the Messiah to stop saving, the breath of life itself to stop- breathing. Jesus, the Living Word, eclipsed their socio-religious order.

Jesus said, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

One theologian says there’s a few layers to Jesus answer that are important for us today.

First, Jesus’s truth is too good to have its mouth shut. It might be temporarily silenced, but not for long. Second, if Jesus disciples were to 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 to from these stones to raise up children of Abraham.” Lastly, injustice will not long prevail. Habakkuk prophesizes that the very stones of the house built on corruption “will cry out from the wall”- H Stephen Shoemaker

Mandated silence, cowardice and complacency, injustice and corruption- weighty issues we face today to which the momentous layers of Jesus answer to the Pharisees- lay bare.

“I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

I wonder who among us might be trying to silence Jesus today and what weighty issues his response would lay bare?

In poet Richard Wilbur’s Christmas Hymn “A Stable Lamp is Lighted” we encounter more deeply the image of the stones crying out in the week we are welcoming with cloaks and palm fronds.

This child through Davids's city
Shall ride in triumph by
The palm shall strew in branches
And every stone shall cry
And every stone shall cry
Though heavy and dull and dumb
And lie within the roadway
To pave the kingdom come

The world which lay spread out before us today, would cause Jesus to weep. He weeps everyday over his beloved creation. And he rides on, rides on in majesty towards the transformation of the cross which embodies the universal reconciliation of the resurrection. God's tears do not wash away our hope and praise; Gods tears water the soils beneath our feet, cleanse the hearts of the righteous, and crash against all forms of tyranny and injustice and indifference and selfishness. The tears of Immanuel reshape all that is made by God and all that is made by humankind. The tears of Hosanna smooth out our edges and re-purpose us, to liberate us from fear and or doubt or oppressing silence, to sing our own song unlike anyone else.

Jesus words remain a radical reminder: Praise will not be silenced. So, our question then is not whether praise will happen, but whether we will join the chorus already rising from the core of the earth itself.

Will your Hosanna's be reserved for the pew? Your shouts left at the door? Or will you pave the road to the kingdom which lays before us all? Oh Jesus beloved Fox Cities spread before us against which the waters of creation crash- shuhhhhh, crash-shuhhhhh, crash shuhhhhh. Polishing

us into something more beautiful as we tumble in song towards our beloved creator, each with our own unique voice.

All creation realizes this moment.

Let us save our alleluias for next chapter in the story, meantime we fearlessly and faithfully say:

Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest. Praise be to God!

Amen.