

## “Shouting Stones”—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.”

The Preacher in Ecclesiastes tells us that there is a time for everything:

a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to seek, and a time to lose  
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
a time to tear, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.

A time for everything, says the Preacher—but apparently the Pharisees who met the procession proclaiming Jesus as “the king who comes in the name of the Lord” felt that this was neither the time nor the place for this. “Teacher,” they said, “order your disciples to stop.”

These processions were nothing new, to be sure. Occasionally some revolutionary would seize upon some ancient practices and messianic prophecies to proclaim himself the Deliverer of Israel. The crossed palm branches carried by those in the procession were a sign of Jewish independence, dating back to the time of the Maccabees, when Israel threw off the yoke of their foreign oppressors and enjoyed a time of independence. The tradition held that the Messiah would come to the Mount of Olives and then move into the Holy City of Jerusalem; and, according to the prophecy of Zechariah, the deliverer-king would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. Everyone who saw one of these processions knew that the leader was making a statement: he was proclaiming himself as the Messiah, the long-awaited Deliverer-King of Israel who would liberate the Covenant People and restore the glory of the kingdom of David.

Usually these processions came to nothing—the leader was often arrested and executed, and his followers lost heart and faded away. Sometimes these processions led to violence, and the Romans would smash any resistance with their iron fist.

But the Pharisees were probably not troubled by the political implication of this latest messianic procession. Jesus was a revolutionary, to be sure, and hopefully the Romans would take care of him as such. But it was the religious implications of what Jesus had said and done that worried them. This carpenter's son had gone about Galilee preaching and teaching that God's love was available to the least, the last, and the lost of the world—indeed, God was *looking* for the least and the last and the lost. That was a challenge to the Pharisees, who believed that only by a strict keeping of the Law of Moses could one be in favor with God. Jesus was a revolutionary, to be sure, but his revolution wasn't political—his revolution was about sharing the love of God for one and all. No wonder the Pharisees said, ““Teacher, order your disciples to stop.”

But Jesus wouldn't quiet his disciples—instead, he told the Pharisees, ““I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

So what does that mean: “[I]f these were silent, the stones would shout out.” It means, very simply, that God's Word is going to be proclaimed. It means that the Good News of God's love is going to be made known to the world. It means that the truth of God's saving and transforming love for everyone—including the least, the last, and the lost—is going to be shared, with the invitation to embrace it, to receive it as a free gift and come to know the forgiveness of sins, the transformation of life, and the promise of eternal life with God that comes with accepting God's love. And if Jesus' disciples will not proclaim God's love then even the cold, inanimate rock will shout out to the world the love of God made real in Jesus. God's love will be proclaimed, one way or another.

It seems to me, then, that there's a choice that we together as the Church of the Lord Jesus and we as individual disciples have to make: Will we keep silent about the love of God we've experienced in Jesus? Or will we join the disciples in that triumphal procession as "the king who comes in the name of the Lord"? Will we join those who shout, or will the stones have to do the shouting for us?

Sharing the love of God made real in Jesus isn't as difficult as we want to make it (and we make it difficult, I suspect, because we don't want to do it). We've been over this ground before, and there's nothing new that I'm going to say here, but it bears repeating. So...

Sharing God's love doesn't require any special training—you don't have to have a seminary degree or take any special courses to share the love of God with someone else. You don't have to go knocking on the doors of strangers or confronting people on the streets. You don't have to have custom license plates or bumper stickers or social media posts and pages. All you need is a compassionate, caring heart for someone you know (or maybe even someone you don't know) and a willing spirit.

It begins with caring—caring about someone who needs to be introduced or re-introduced to Jesus. I'm always impressed by the ease with which children and youth invite their friends to come to worship with them. It doesn't seem to bother them a bit—it's we adults who seem to have a problem with it, for whatever reason or excuse. I often think about the story (whether it's true or not, I don't know) of Henry Ford and one of his friends, who was an insurance salesman. One day the friend got word that Ford had just purchased a large policy from one of his competitors, so he went to Ford and said, "I thought we were friends! Why didn't you buy your policy from me?" Henry Ford replied, "Because you never asked.

We know from research that most people, if asked, would accept an invitation to worship. So why not offer it? The worst they can say is no, and if they accept and come, it may be the open door that leads them to knowing or getting re-acquainted with Jesus. If we care about the people we know, we'll make that invitation.

There is another way to help people get to know or become re-acquainted with Jesus, one that also requires a heart of compassion and care—and that is sharing the story of what Jesus has done in our lives in situations of hurt or crisis. Some will object and say that that's manipulative—that's playing on people's emotions and needs at a time when they're down. But we're not trying to manipulate anyone—we're simply sharing what Jesus has done for us, with the gentle suggestion that he can do the same for another. Others will object that they wouldn't know what to say. But do we remember the words of Jesus? He said, "When you get hauled before the authorities and are required to answer for your faith, don't worry about what you're going to say, because the Spirit will give you

the words.” I truly believe that when the right moment comes, the Spirit will not only let us know that moment but will also guide us in what to say and do. The person with whom we’re sharing may not accept the love of Jesus at that moment, but we’ll have planted the seed that may very well blossom into the Christian life.

Now, I have no doubt that, as you and I walk out of this worship space today, someone will say to me, “I prefer to witness with my actions.” And that’s all well and good, as long as we understand that Christian action goes beyond being good and upright and moral—there are a lot of people in this world who are good and upright and moral, but they’re not Christians. Christian action calls us to go the second mile for the sake of others—but if we’re sharing the love of Jesus, sooner or later we’re going to have to tell the recipients of our actions that we’re doing it for the sake of Jesus.

Now I said we needed two things to help us share the love of God made real in Jesus. One is a caring, compassionate heart; the other is a willing spirit—a spirit willing to be guided by the Holy Spirit. A willing spirit means we’re willing to be guided by the Spirit in sharing the love of Jesus with others. We’re willing to pray, not just for people in general, but for specific people with whom we might share. We’re willing to trust that the Spirit is going to show us the people to whom we need to go and will show us the right moment and will give us the words to say. And we need to trust that the Spirit is working ahead of us. We Methodists tend to forget that we’re not alone in this adventure of sharing God’s love in our community and in the world. We believe in something called “prevenient grace,” God’s Spirit working in our lives to draw us to him, even before we know there’s a God or that he loves us and wants us to love him. That grace has been at work in our lives, and that grace is working in the lives of everyone who needs to know or get re-acquainted with Jesus. So we’re not going into this making what the salespeople term a “cold call”—the Spirit’s already prepared the way! And when we’ve shared what the Spirit has given us to share, we have to trust that he will take it and do with it what he will. We plant the seeds—God through his Spirit makes them blossom. But we won’t plant the seeds of the love of Jesus unless we have a caring, compassionate heart for others and a spirit that is willing to trust the Holy Spirit.

I have no doubt that some of those who were proclaiming Jesus as “the king who comes in the name of the Lord” were screaming for his crucifixion at the end of the week. I have no doubt that some lost heart and faded away—even those closest to him ran away when he was betrayed and arrested. Yet the Good News of God’s love made real in Jesus has been shared throughout the world. Millions have come to know his saving, redeeming love. Yet there are millions more who yet need to know it. We can’t reach millions, though, can we? But maybe it’s enough to share with those around us. Let’s share the love of God with those around us

who need to know it, so there will be no need for shouting stones. Dear God, let it be so!