

Even the Stones Cry Out

Sermon 138 | Greystone Baptist Church | April 10, 2022

Luke 19:28-40

Don't you hate it when you feel like you aren't being heard? When you've taken the time to think about what you want to say, you've said it clearly and carefully, with respect, and still, there is a misunderstanding... a disconnect.

Or what about when you have a good idea or when you can see a problem coming. Or when you have a solution... but you can't seem to get anyone to pay attention to you long enough to hear what you're trying to say, much less to heed your advice and avoid the impending doom.

But then again, when the doom does come at least we'll be able to say those four most satisfying words: "I told you so!"

Sometimes when we feel unheard over and over again, we learn and adjust our behavior. Sometimes learning to speak up, to interrupt, to push through until we know we have made our point. Other times deciding it isn't worth it. So we close our mouths. We stop trying to help out by offering our perspective. Then we sit back and watch things unfold.

Nobody likes to feel unheard and yet, we all feel it some time or another.

This year at the statewide gathering for Cooperative Baptists, we focused on the scripture from Genesis 16 when Hagar flees to the wilderness and there, she is seen by God. Later on, in chapter 17, her son Ishmael is born and they flee once again to the wilderness and God hears Hagar and the cries of her son. Two lives lived in the margins, a slave woman and her child, both seen and heard by God.

Maybe it is because I served on the planning committee for this year's gathering and so the stories of Hagar and Ishmael are fresh on my mind. But this week as our attention has begun to turn toward Jerusalem with Jesus as he makes his way toward the cross, I cannot help but remember that everything that has happened up to this point has been an embodiment of God's propensity for hearing all that is so often unheard.

This is especially pronounced in Luke's Gospel in which Jesus' ministry begins with the reading of the Isaiah scroll in Nazareth:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Here, Jesus begins by stating his purpose, his mission: Jesus was called to the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed. And his calling was to declare their freedom, that's what the "year of the Lord's favor" meant. In Jesus, the kingdom was drawing near, and that was good news for the people who so often went unseen and unheard: the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed.

For fifteen more chapters, Jesus sets his sights on the margins, looking for people in and around Galilee who had been overlooked, ignored, and unheard for too long. As he did he found a leper, a paralytic, a fishermen (a few fishermen actually), a man with a withered hand, a tax collector, some Pharisees, crowds of sinners and people with diseases... he found a Roman centurion and a widow whose only son had passed away. As his journey continued to unfold he encountered a woman whom everyone had labelled, "sinner." He began to teach the disciples his ways and word begins to spread around Galilee, this man is listening to those who had long been cast aside. They are being invited to join him on the way. It is no longer just one man, a boy from Nazareth, but this man is a leader with a different kind of mission: a mission that brings hearing, healing, and hope. A mission that insists on going after the one (each and every one) when the ninety-nine are already on board, ready to go. A mission that refuses to let anyone be lost due to health, wealth, or circumstance. A mission that hears the cries of the people and insists that there is a better way.

This "better way" of course is proclaimed in the Gospel as the Kingdom of God and it is described in parables and announced with Jesus' own presence as he travels throughout the region seeking out sinners and listening to outcasts.

People are starting to notice.

And this mission isn't just a small thing anymore, it is becoming more of a movement.

A movement of seeing and hearing.

A movement of healing and hope.

A movement of God's abundant love.

So when Jesus enters into Jerusalem just before Passover, he comes with a procession of people shouting "Hosanna! Save us!"

Jesus scholars, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan wrote a book together about the last week of Jesus' life. In it, they sort through the Gospel narratives and historical accounts of the events surrounding this Passover. Their work reminds us that even though Christians often celebrate this Sunday, this Palm Sunday, waving Palm branches and celebrating the "King who comes in the name of the Lord!" This was not the only procession into Jerusalem that was happening.

Each year, for the beginning of the Passover celebration, the Roman Governor for Judea would ride into town from the coastal residence with his gubernatorial caravan. The people would line the streets to pay homage and offer their support for Rome. This was an

important symbol for both the Roman Empire, its Emperor, and the people as it reminded everyone who was in charge.

Yes, the Passover was a religious festival, but it was only made possible by the all-powerful, all-mighty Roman government. And it would only happen, peacefully, if the people kept in line. Anything else would cause chaos, questions, and potential anarchy.

So on one side of town Pontius Pilate rides in, backed by the empire, dressed in armor, surrounded by guards, and on a horse fit and ready for battle. And on the other side (figuratively speaking), here comes Jesus, backed by fishermen and tax collectors, dressed in the clothes of a peasant, surrounded by the outcasts and the unheard, and riding on a colt.

Two men representing two very different kinds of kings, process into Jerusalem.

The stage is set. The story is unfolding. Which procession will prevail?

To be honest, it doesn't look too good for Jesus and his followers. Their enthusiasm is no match for Pilate's military backing. If there was to be a battle between the Kingdom of Rome and the Kingdom of God, represented by Pilate and Jesus of course, the safer bet would be on Rome. But still the people who follow Jesus into Jerusalem, and the ones who line the streets persist in yelling out "Blessed is the **King** who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Do they know something we have yet to learn?

Some of the Pharisees approached, perhaps they were trying to help soften the edges of the Jesus movement as it entered Jerusalem saying, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." Notice, the Pharisees called him "teacher" rather than "king," maybe they felt that term – being a little less political – wouldn't be so offensive. Maybe if Jesus could just continue to be a teacher, his journey wouldn't have to lead to the cross. But Jesus knows his mission is more than teaching, he is called Rabbi, Teacher, yes, but he is also called the Prince of Peace, the Lord of Lords, and King of Kings. His mission cannot be limited to teaching in the margins, his mission is to establish the Kingdom of God in all the earth. A Kingdom that practices liberating love, and release to all who are captive. A Kingdom that is built on inclusion and welcome, relationship and healing. A Kingdom where all are seen and all are heard.

Unfortunately, that kingdom was at odds with Rome.

In an episode of *This American Life* called, "Baby Scientists with Faulty Data," a father tells a story about the first time his four-year-old daughter asked about the meaning of Christmas. He told her that we celebrate Christmas because it's Jesus' birthday. Curious as she was for more information on this Jesus fellow, the father went out and got a children's bible for them to read together. The little girl loved it. As they read from the Bible, the daughter would ask her father, about Jesus' teachings. The father would explain the best he

could and often found himself summing it up with “Love your neighbor as yourself,” or “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

One day, the father and daughter were driving past a church when the daughter noticed a huge crucifix out in front, and she asked, “Who is that?”

Realizing that they hadn’t yet gotten to this part of the story the father said, “Yeah, well, that’s Jesus, and I forgot to tell you the ending... The message that he had was so radical and unnerving to the prevailing authorities at the time that they had to kill him. They came to the conclusion that he would have to die. That message [he had] was too troublesome.”

About a month later, mid-January, the girl’s preschool was off, in honor of the holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr. The dad took the day off work and decided to take his daughter out for lunch. At the restaurant she saw a full-page submission from an art student in one of the local schools, a drawing of Martin Luther King, and she asked: “Who’s that?”

“Well,” the father said, “he was a preacher.”

“for Jesus?” the little girl asked.

“Yeah, actually he was. But there was another thing that he was really famous for, which is that he had a message.”

“What was his message?” She asked.

“Well, he said that you should treat everybody the same, no matter what they look like.”

The little girl thought for a moment before making sense of all that she was taking in.

“Well, that’s what Jesus said.”

“Yeah,” the father chimed in, “I guess it is. I never thought of it that way, but yeah, that’s sort of like ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’”

The little girl thought for a moment more before asking her next question, “did they kill him, too?”¹

Unfortunately, things don’t usually work out that well for prophets. For those who refuse to allow the good news of Jesus Christ to stay quietly in the margins. But here’s the thing, it’s ok. Because we know the rest of the story. Yes, Jesus rode into Jerusalem to cheering crowds shouting “Hosanna! Save us!” And yes, Jesus offered salvation to all whose cries for help he heard on that day – just as he had every day before. But those cries and his response, the calling that God placed on his life, his very identity as God in human form, the one who ushered in the New Kingdom, all of that led him straight to the cross where he would breathe his last and speak his last.

But it’s ok, he said, because even if you silence me, my disciples will cry out. And even if you silence them too, even then, when you think you’ve squashed the movement, then, Jesus says, the stones will cry out.

¹ <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/188/transcript>

That's what God's love does.

It keeps on. It persists. It will not stop no matter what tries to silence it and quiet it down.

God's love will not be silent.

This year, on this Palm Sunday, we too join the procession of Christ followers. We may not be marching into Jerusalem, but we are marching on in life – in our world, in our city, and in our neighborhood. And just as Pilate's procession offered a false hope backed by military power and the wealth of the greatest Empire the ancient world had ever seen, we have our own contemporary versions of the same thing: life secured by the powers of wealth, war, and comfort.

Maybe we have already cried out from the margins of our own lives: *Hosanna! Save me!*

And maybe we have known, personally, the joy of God's loving salvation.

And if so, the choice is even more pressing now. Will we stay the course all the way to the cross, shouting: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord...?"

Will that be our proclamation with our words and with our deeds, so that others may know the joy of God's salvation?

Or will we quiet ourselves at the request of the Pharisees because we are afraid of what might happen next?

Even a four-year-old can see that there are serious consequences to living fully into God's mission of love.

But then again, Jesus says that if we are indeed silenced... even the rocks will cry out.

So I guess the question is... *Will we?*