

The Park Road Pulpit
Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church
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When the Stones Cry Out
Luke 19.29-40
March 28, 2010
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So I've stood atop the Mount of Olives and looked over into the city of Jerusalem. I've looked down over the Kidron Valley seeing the treetops of the Garden of Gethsemane. I've actually walked the basic path from the Mount of Olives through that valley and into the Holy City entering the gate that led me down the Via Dolorosa known as The Way of Suffering. I've stood atop the Mount of Olives and tried to picture this Triumphal Entry. He sent ahead for a colt. He gave a lot of specifics. He did a lot of delegating that day. Go get this. Go fetch that. And the disciples did just as he asked down to every last detail. And as they hoisted Jesus up on his trusty steed, they began to see what they had been feeling deep down inside for some time – that they were in the presence of greatness. And so they started laying down their cloaks and throwing branches down in front of the animal that was carrying this One who had completely changed their lives.

Triumphal Entries were common among royalty and people of political power. Jerusalem was not unaccustomed to grand pageantry for their leaders. But somehow this little colt and a few branches and garments didn't compare with the fancy carriages and pomp and circumstance that most royalty enjoyed. Instead, this Triumphal Entry was arranged by a pretty motley crew and rather than a band with royal trumpets blaring, all Jesus had was his people shouting and singing their Hosannas – *Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord*. As he made his way from this mountain that overlooked the city down through the valley, his followers and friends and disciples walked alongside recognizing Jesus as someone worth shouting about –

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. And the Pharisees suggest to Jesus that he'd better shush his followers. And Jesus puts them in their place: *I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.*

Have you ever been to Yosemite National Park? Have you at least seen Ansel Adam's famous black and white photographs of El Capitan or Half Dome? It's been about 20 years since I've seen that place with my own two eyes, but I remember driving into that valley with such anticipation to see these famous rocks and around every turn we would say – that must be it. Until we'd drive a little farther and think no, that must be it. Until we came upon Half Dome and then we knew we had arrived. We set up our little tent in the belly of Yosemite National Park and I swear to you the rocks were shouting out God's glory.

Have you ever been to Sedona, Arizona and seen for yourself the most photographed rock formation in the world? Cathedral Rock. This was the very end of our summer travels last year and as much as my heart wanted to climb it, my body simply said – take a gander from afar, honey, you're tired. And we did. We drove down this 2-lane road that turned into a dusty dirt road. Then we walked down a little path and waded in a creek and then sat and just stared at the best view of Cathedral Rock and I swear to you that rock was shouting out God's majesty.

As we walked the 111.5 kilometers of El Camino de Santiago last summer, at every single ½ kilometer marker, we placed a stone and called a name out loud. We placed ___ stones on that walk – many of you named individually. The kilometer markers themselves were made of stone with an arrow helping us find our way along our pilgrimage trail. Other pilgrims had already placed stones before us, but our stones served as prayers – prayers of thanksgiving and prayers of intercession and prayers of praise. And I swear to you those stones cry out today your

names and the names of family and friends. I can honestly say that practice of placing stones and calling names was the most meaningful prayer ritual I have ever known.

And just down from the top of the Mount of Olives is a Jewish graveyard. Each tomb is an above ground stone box. And atop each grave are rocks and stones and pebbles symbolizing the prayers of those who have come to mourn. And I swear to you those rocks cry out in that city so full of political and religious history and tension.

But in our Triumphal Entry account – and each Gospel tells this story – the rocks didn't have to shout out for Jesus' followers were doing it themselves. And I think about what we hear shouted out today. Whether on the congressional debate floor or in a basketball coliseum, the words we hear shouted today are degrading and ranting and violent and hateful. And it is embarrassing. Have we lost any sense of respect and tact and decorum as a nation? Where's the shouting about Hope? Who's shouting about Peace? When will we hear shouts of Joy? And what about shouts of Love? If The Church doesn't learn to do some shouting about these words that were just our focus a few months ago during Advent as we prepared for Christmas, we will be relegating our responsibility to the stones to shout it for us.

It's so easy to wag our fingers at the congressmen/women – shame on them – (especially the ones we didn't vote for) – for being so mean-spirited and calling each other names and inciting raucous and violent behavior. Shame on them for acting like children when they don't get their way. But before we get too high and mighty, perhaps we should take a look back and see what we've been shouting lately. Oh, hopefully we haven't been as rowdy as "they" have been, but that doesn't mean that we are not culpable. We tend to be more reserved and reverent. We only shout in the privacy of our own homes, behind closed doors – while on the outside we

make folks think we are calm, cool and collected. But when this is our way, we only beat down the very ones we love the most. Some only shout in their own minds, repeating over and over and over again all the things they wish they could say out loud but know better. And all of that hatred and ill will gets bottled up inside until we feel we might just explode. Or then there are those that play those tapes of negative messages about someone or about themselves – while trying to hide their own shame.

But shout praise about Jesus? I don't think the Pharisees would ever have to tell Jesus to calm us down. I'm afraid we are too dependent on the stones to do our shouting for us. I am convinced that the name of Jesus will never die. I think that is what he was saying to those Pharisees, who, by the way, we don't hear from again after this scene in Luke's gospel. It would seem that Jesus shut them up when he said that if the people stop their praise then the stones would shout it out – all of creation will cry out even if we keep silent. But what if? What if we decided to join the stones in their praise? What if we decided to live a life of the praise of God so that all of our actions and all of our words and all of our prayers shouted out *Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!* What if we turned our words of criticism and critique into words of appreciation and gratitude? What if we turned our words of hatred and prejudice into words of care and acceptance? What if we began to shout about Hope and shout about Peace and shout about Joy and shout about Love? And all some of you can think right now is – not so loud, Amy. What could happen in your home if your shouts, if your cries were about goodness and healing and wholeness and Shalom? It could transform it into a haven of goodness and grace. What would happen in your work? It could heighten creativity and productivity. What could happen in your school? It would mean less drama and more friendships. What would happen in our city and in our church? Oh, we could change . . . the world. Literally. You can still speak a

strong and prophetic voice. You can still say the hard things that have to be said. I'm not talking about becoming sweet and syrupy. I'm talking about speaking – no, shouting – the praise of God, for in Jesus we caught a glimpse of what God intends for us all: Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. So we shout truth to power, in Love. And we shout justice to oppression, in Hope. And we cry Peace to chaos. And we live Joy even when we cannot find our happy place.

Just recently someone was talking to me and in a moment of deep desperation she looked at me with fear in her eyes and said, “Tell me there's hope.” And I said, “There's Hope.” Will she reconcile with her family? I don't know. Will she get a job? I don't know. Will she pull herself out of the dark place that she is in? I have no idea. But she needed someone to tell her that there was Hope, and she turned to The Church to hear it. And even when I find it hard to see and believe for myself, I am called to shout it out: Hope.

Don't you know that if we started shouting God's praise people would think we had lost our minds. Following Jesus means that we are constantly in the presence of greatness. And following Jesus has changed my life. And I for one am not going to let the stones do my shouting for me. *Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.* May it be so.