Rocks Keep Silent Peace Presbyterian Church

Luke 19:28-48 Palm Sunday

Elizabeth M. Deibert 14 April 2019

Life is sometimes too much. After all day yesterday at Cedarkirk, I’m tired. But I’m not as tired as some of you, who have heavy loads to bear right now. Holy Week is heavy week. It is heavy to bear because of the narrative of Jesus’ death in focus. It is heavy to bear for anyone working in the church because of multiple services. I read the postcard from several other churches this week – one said two services on Good Friday, two on Saturday, and four on Sunday. I tossed the card in the trash and said a prayer that the people leading those services get some rest before the heavy weekend. For me, heaviness began as I got in touch with the weariness of several families in the church, including my own, over the last few weeks, after the joyful celebration and exhaustion of our Dedication of the Sanctuary. Life is so full of the tension between joy and pain, suffering and redemption, agony and ecstasy.

Holy Week reminds us that God is with us on the high days of celebration when we ride triumphantly to graduations, holding new babies, worshiping in beautiful new sanctuaries, securing new houses or jobs, celebrating anniversaries or birthdays – God is with us with life is good, filling our lives with joy! And God is with us, when we are anxious about what is to come, when we are betrayed, forsaken by supposed friends, experiencing failure or loss of valuable dreams and relationships, when we are ourselves dying a painful death. Even in hell, God is there. God in Christ went there to redeem all of that pain and separation with loving presence, because the worst of the worst is to suffer alone. And the best of the best news of our Christian narrative is that we are not alone. As St. John of the Cross once said, “I saw the river over which every soul must pass to reach the kingdom of heaven, and the name of that river was suffering: and I saw the boat which carries souls across the river, and the name of that boat was love.” Love is the only boat that will sustain us in our journey across the river of suffering.

Strangely enough, our seasons of suffering are often preceded by moments of triumph, though we ourselves know that pain is ahead. Hear the story of Jesus’ triumphal entry and anticipated grief:

**Luke 19:28-48** (NRSV)

**28**After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. **29**When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, **30**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.****31****If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’”* **32**So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. **33**As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, *“Why are you untying the colt?”* **34**They said, *“The Lord needs it.”* **35**Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. **36**As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. **37**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, **38**saying, *“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”* **39**Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, *“Teacher, order your disciples to stop.”***40**He answered,*“I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”*

Let’s stop here, where most Christians will stop their reading today, though we will read on in a minute. These verses about securing a colt, colt of a donkey in other Gospels. Jesus seems calm, matter-of-fact and tense when he tells the disciples to take someone’s colt. He anticipates their concern about taking it, by saying, rather bluntly, “Just say ‘The Lord needs it.’” In this moment, Jesus seems to have the focus and determination of someone who is facing great stress. Just do it. Just say, “The Lord needs it.” Do they know who “the Lord” is?

There must have been power in those words, because most owners would have said, “Wait, a minute. That’s my colt. You can’t have that.”

So he rides into Jerusalem, and because of the other Gospels we see the waving of palm branches. Here in Luke there are only cloaks being spread, as a first century red carpet being laid for those whose entrance is significant enough to be honored. Luke tells us there is a whole multitude of disciples, more than the twelve. Thank you, Luke, for always including women. They’ve seen his deeds of power and they rejoice. They think surely this is the moment when all will recognize his authority. But no, not the Pharisees, who are threatened by his power among the people, and by his words of challenge to them. No, the power of love and goodness will be stop right here. No, tell your fan club to shut their mouths. They are making far too much noise. But Jesus knows he is in deep trouble now. There is no turning back. Pharisees, if my people are silent, the whole cosmos, inanimate objects like rocks will shout out! The crying of rocks, the tumbling down of the stones of the temple is only about 40 years away from this moment, and Luke writes his Gospel with the perspective that follows that event.

**41**As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, **42**saying, *“If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.****43****Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side.****44****They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”*

If only they could have seen Jesus and the things that make for peace. If only we…where are we headed? Is it to the destruction of the things we value? If only the human race were not so blind to goodness, if only we were not silent, when injustice rears its ugly head all around us, if only we would speak up when the Spirit is quietly murmuring in our soul something that it right and true that needs to be spoken. As Martin Niemoller, German Lutheran pastor said, First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me. If only we had the courage of Jesus – don’t worry, disciples. Take the donkey colt and say, “The Lord needs it.” Don’t worry, disciples. Speak the truth in love. Tell the world what it really needs is love and prayer, not money and world power and fame.

**45**Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; **46**and he said, *“It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer’; but you have made it a den of robbers.”* **47**Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; **48**but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

If only we could speak up against the hypocrisy, the greed, meanness, and make every house, especially God’s house, a house of prayer, a house of kindness. Every day Jesus was there – where he was troubled by the way the powerful were taking advantage of the weak, and he was teaching the true love and justice and peace of God. And ultimately words were not enough. Words were followed by action. God in Jesus Christ demonstrated what love is. Love is present. Love is active. Love is not silent. Love suffers with and for. Love never ends. Love cannot die. Like the seed which falls to the ground, it is by death reborn to beautiful new life. This is the gift of Holy Week.

Our middle hymn which Amy will introduce to you, singing the first verse alone, carries us from Jesus’ birth through his life, death, and resurrection announces that every stone will cry, because of the magnitude of this event. Every stone – stones of the roadway, stones of the temple, gratitude rocks that we stack up when we know God has been with us. Stone in front of the tomb. All the stones will cry, must cry, because we still stuck in the human condition and sometimes unable to say enough to properly announce his coming. The stones must cry. We sit sometimes in empty, fearful silence, but the stones will cry. This is for our difficult moments when we cannot help ourselves or anyone else.

Later in this serve, the choral anthem will give us a different perspective. Ain’t no rock gonna shout for me. Rocks keep silent. I’m gonna shout in victory! This anthem is for those times we are feeling strong enough to speak up now and declare that Jesus saves those who are down and low! Brian Stevenson, Alabama trial lawyer for death row inmates, who founded the Equal Justice Initiative and is behind the Lynching Museum in Montgomery, tells the story of a grandma, whose compassion was broken open by someone’s kindness in a courtroom, when her 16 year-old grandson was murdered. In her deep grief, she decided to go to the courtroom regularly to help others with her loving presence – both families of the victims and the accused. She said, “I need to be here to catch some of the stones that people throw at each other.”

This Holy Week as you face both life and death bravely, as you find your voice to speak up for what is right, do know that when life is too much, you have a Solid Rock in Jesus Christ to Whom you can cling.