

Text: Luke 19:28-40 (focus on vss.39-40) & Matthew 21:15
“Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, rebuke your disciples!’ ‘I tell you,’ He replied, ‘if they keep quiet, the *stones* will cry out.’”

Theme: Shouting Stones (From The Liturgy of the Palms)

About a year and a half ago at our Fall Voters’ Meeting, I showed a series of slides. They revealed once magnificent churches throughout Europe now vacant or converted to public offices, commercial stores, beer halls, and all sorts of other uses. What stories do their *stones* tell? But it’s not just Europe. Go downtown, Colorado Springs. What do the *stones* of our empty churches say?

As Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, bouncing along on the back of a donkey, His followers and other admirers clipped palm branches from the trees, waving them as He rides before them. Waving of palm branches was a sign of welcome, hospitality, honor. But then many in that crowd began to shout: “HOSANNA! HOSANNA! HOSANNA! HOSANNA TO THE KING!”

And that is where things got interesting. It had turned political. And Jesus’ critics were panic-stricken by this demonstration. It was out of control. You see, they had worked out a careful arrangement between the church and the powers of Imperial Rome. And they did not want any political fanatics disrupting this delicate alliance they had so carefully constructed.

So these critics approach Jesus and demand: “Tell Your people to shut up!” They want Him to tone down the uproar, tame the outburst. It’s just not proper. It is estimated that during Jesus’ earthly lifetime there were at least 60 armed rebellions against the Roman occupation forces. And now, these people are waving palm branches and proclaiming Jesus as King, well it was a threatening situation.

Upon receiving the demand that He tell His followers to be quiet, Jesus says something very interesting on that first Palm Sunday: “I tell you if you could quiet down these people, the very *stones* would shout.” There is something about Jesus that can make even a *rock* want to shout.

This is not an unusual picture in Scripture. The Old Testament portrays trees clapping their hands for joy, hills skipping in a dance, waves crying out aloud, and mountains shouting! All creation praising the Creator.

Once upon a time I spent lots of time camping in the woods at night. And I was always impressed by how loud nature can be. Some people claim they go out into the wilderness seeking “some peace and quiet.” But nature is alive with sound if you listen. Throughout the night there are various cries, rustlings and scuffling in the dark, insects buzzing. And long before daybreak, more creatures begin calling to one another preparing for a new day.

One of the church’s great hymns sings out that same story: “The heavens are telling the glory of God.” This creative God has made even the material universe to sing, to speak up, to testify.

So those who want to keep a lid on things, those who have a stake in the status quo and find the present order comfortable, always try to keep things quiet. They don’t like noise and commotion. When Jesus entered into Jerusalem, He was entering as a king, a new ruler, an adversary who threatened the thrones of power.

And children, the least and the lowest, the powerless in society, began to shout and sing praises: HOSANNA! Can you imagine? Children threatened the powers that be. “BE QUIET!” said the authorities. And Jesus replied, “If you silence them, even the *stones* would shout.”

Over the years I’ve watched parents bring little children into the church

service, and say to them as they come through the doors, “Hush, now. Quiet down. Now is the time for our *church* voices.” “Church” voices. They’ve been taught that church voices should be low, soft-sounding, whispered. Hmmm? Matthew’s version of this event, chapter 21, verse 15: “But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and *children* who were crying out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ they became indignant.” Indignant.

But Jesus defends these children with their raucous outbursts, their shouting and praises, saying, “Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast prepared praise for Thyself” (Psalm 8:2). OK. Might that imply that “church voices,” the voices of Jesus’ followers should be more like the little child: loud, abrasive, raucous even? A Pentecostal event? Heaven forbid!

But didn’t Jesus also say, “Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words shall make Me ashamed of him?” And didn’t Jesus say that they would drag us before princes and in the courts and we would not know what to say, but the Holy Spirit would tell us what to say and give us words to shout”? Have we perhaps been too long silent?

It appears to be the nature of this God to have a witness, to enable testimony. On that first Palm Sunday little children looked at Jesus and saw who He really was. He was coming into town on the back of a donkey to rule, to take charge. And they *shouted* that their deliverance was at hand, the King had come.

And when these little witnesses were threatened and intimidated, Jesus defiantly replied that even if the powers that be were successful in shutting them up, the very *stones* would cry out!

We’ve heard that the churches of Europe and England are dying. And yet when Marilyn and I were in London just a few years ago, we were walking around the old neighborhood near our hotel one evening. And we could hear voices coming from within the rocky exterior of an old cathedral, the happy singing of young voices. That Sunday evening while the old folks were at home in front of

their tellies, these young people were gathered to praise their Lord. Jesus also said that the very gates of hell would not prevail against His Church. The children will sing out.

It is the nature of this God to always have a witness, always to raise the dead, always to have somebody to testify and tell the story. There are some people in this congregation who believe that they are just no good a public speaking. There are some here who are shy, reserved, and self-effacing. And yet, the Holy Spirit has given you some good words to say, and by the power of God, despite resistance, you have stood up and testified. You have been a witness to Jesus.

Now I'm not calling you a "*stone*." But Jesus stated that He could make even the *stones* to shout if the people would not. And I do pray that you do not find yourself on the other side – trying to keep that Word confined within the stone walls, keeping it down to a "church voice," stifling the children. If they are too noisy, you are sitting too far in the back. There are open pews right up front where Jesus can hear your praise and not your grumbling.

Sorry. Just had to get that off my chest. What would a *stone* say when it shouts? What would be its witness? On this day, as the new King intrudes among us and challenges our comfortable arrangements with unfaithfulness, here's what I hear the *stones* (and the children) saying: "Follow Him! Join the parade of those who through the ages have looked at this carpenter's Son, this Jewish rabbi, bouncing down the street on the back of a donkey and they have seen their Lord and their Savior. Jesus Christ is Lord! Let us go after Him. Let us walk behind Him. All the way to the Cross. It's time for the *stones* to shout. Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna! Amen.