

FIRST LESSON: Zechariah 9:9
SECOND LESSON: Luke 19:28-40
April 10, 2022
PALM SUNDAY

“The Stones Will Cry Out”
Sermon © Lisa C. Farrell

Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead and instructed them to go into a village where they would find a colt tied up which no one had ever ridden. And he told them to help themselves to it! He explained that if anyone objected all they need do was say, “The Lord needs it.” What a strange thing to tell them to do! Stranger still is the fact that things were just as he said they would be, and they returned with the donkey colt.

Donkeys were considered noble animals, but not intimidating ones. A horse could be skittish. Donkeys were steady. Kings rode into war on impressive stallions. The donkey engaged in much humbler labor. And the fact that Jesus chose a donkey colt would have made no sense at all, but for an obscure prophecy from Zechariah that he seemed to be enacting. “See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, ^[L]lowly and riding on a donkey, ^[SEP]on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

The colt had never been ridden. This was an important part of the prophetic fulfillment. Any animal set aside for a sacred purpose was to be unbroken and unblemished. Humanly speaking we would expect an unbroken colt to be unpredictable and out of control, but there is no mention of difficulty. It did not balk at what it was required to do. Perhaps that is because animals are good at sensing both danger and safety, and the donkey knew it was safe with Jesus.

The road from Bethany and Bethphage to Jerusalem was only about two miles. Given that Passover was approaching it would have been heavily populated with pilgrims. Family groups and caravans, walkers and riders, all would have made the journey together. It was a dusty but festive atmosphere. Jesus rode the donkey colt while his followers walked beside him. As they went people spread their cloaks along the road to honor him. It was the red carpet of the day. Luke doesn't even mention palms. We get that detail from other gospels. As they reached the Mount of Olives the crowd all started joyfully praising God for all the miracles they had seen Jesus do. They said, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

This was dangerous talk. It was one thing to say “blessed is the **one** who comes in the name of the Lord,” but quite another to say, “Blessed is the **king** who comes in the name of the Lord!” Rome portrayed itself as the bringer of civilization and order, but in the conquered regions like Judea, this came at a

high price. Rome was very good at cracking down on dissent. Roman law was never in favor of conquered peoples, and financially the taxes imposed were ruinous. Rome burdened the provinces to benefit itself, and the Roman provincial leaders were generally corrupt. Men became governors in order to get rich by exploiting their territory and when they had acquired enough, they came home to spend it. The Romans slaughtered who they wanted and plundered what they wanted.

Passover was arguably the most volatile and potentially violent time of the year in Jerusalem under Roman rule. Passover reminded the people of their deliverance from the Egyptians. It was about liberation. It summed up the whole experience of the exodus from escape from Pharaoh, wandering in the desert and receiving the law. Passover marked God triumphing over a superpower. This was not lost on the Romans. During Passover Pontius Pilate and his legions left the comfort of their Roman city Caesarea Maritima for the much more cramped quarters in Jerusalem to keep a close eye on things. Soldiers stayed ever-vigilant for trouble.

Jesus did not HAVE TO go to Jerusalem at Passover. We forget that. He could easily have spent it somewhere else. In fact, if Jesus had been smart according to our ideas of smart, he would have avoided Jerusalem like the plague during Passover. Jesus could have gone on for years laying low in the countryside when everything started to get too hot. This confrontation wasn't necessary. It was chosen.

It is not at all surprising that the Pharisees were alarmed by what Jesus' followers were saying. Mention of a king could bring about a brutal Roman reprisal. "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" they urged. But Jesus not only did not comply with that request, he went in the opposite direction saying, "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

Stones were everywhere in this landscape. Israel is rocky terrain. When John the Baptist confronted the Pharisees and Sadducees for their hypocrisy he said, "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham." (Matthew 3:9) As to what Jesus meant, a stone could be just a stone. But the prophet Habakkuk said, "For a stone will cry out from a wall, and a beam from the wood paneling will answer it." (Habakkuk 2: 11) The meaning in context in Habakkuk is that there will be judgment against a nation that plunders the weak and acquires material prosperity through violence. This stone, like Jesus' stones, "cries out." And there is also the "stone which the builders rejected." Those praising Jesus that day were quoting from Psalm 118 which describes the king entering Jerusalem as "the stone the builders rejected," a stone that went on to become the cornerstone. It would not be unusual for Jesus to say something that had layers of meaning.

Jesus demonstrated incredible courage when he entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He directly confronted the powerful who had sold out their faith in exchange for a comfortable life with their Roman overlords. Jesus seemed to confront people all the time! And the people he confronted were always the ones you would least like to confront—because they had power. Calling out a powerful person to their face is asking for trouble. Jesus knew the

consequences, and still did it. And in this case. Jesus said, “I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

There are times to keep our head down and wait, and there are times to act. There are times to be silent, and times to speak. But for every injustice, every lie, every crime against humanity, at some point **the stones will cry out**. It is not possible to repress the truth forever. It is not possible to keep people oppressed forever. The time had come for Jesus to confront the corrupt leadership in Jerusalem. It was no longer a time for silence. If his followers did not speak the truth of who Jesus was out loud, then the stones would.

But, we ask ourselves, what was the result of all this? *Didn't Jesus lose?* Wasn't he arrested? Wasn't he crucified? Was it worth it for him to come out publicly against those in power with the truth?

They are long gone. Jesus rose from the dead. The time had come for God's plan to take shape, and God's plan is still at work in our world today.

There are many times that we get discouraged. I know I have been especially dismayed by the way Putin has kept the Russian people in the dark about what is happening in Ukraine. He is convincing them that lies are true and the truth is a lie, controlling everything they hear and everything they believe. A master manipulator, he appears to have won the war of public opinion. They have no idea what is really going on. But at some point, **the stones will cry out**. In our own nation we have warring media giants each offering their own spin and setting us off against one another. Lies are being told. People with good intentions have been convinced that “the other side” is wholly evil. But at some point, **the stones will cry out**. Truth will emerge. It is not possible to keep it repressed forever. China may think that they have erased the events of Tiananmen Square from all knowledge and memory but that is not possible. For awhile yes. Forever, no. Eventually, **the stones will cry out**.

When we think that it is not worth the cost of speaking the truth, of advocated on behalf of the needy and oppressed, of putting ourselves out there, we can look to Jesus. It may look like evil wins. It looked like evil won the contest between Jesus and the authorities at the end of that week on Good Friday. But Jesus triumphed over death, and ultimately God will always triumph over evil. Amen.

Zechariah 9:9

⁹ Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Luke 19:28-40

28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.**29** As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, **30** “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. **31** If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. **33** As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

34 They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. **36** As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

40 “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”