

PALM SUNDAY C

March 28, 2010

Abiding Peace Lutheran Church – Budd Lake, NJ

Zechariah 9:9—10 Psalm 24 Philippians 2:5—11 Luke 19:28—40

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“If these disciples were silent, the stones would shout out.”

In the summer of 1981 I went to Japan as an exchange student. Our group took a week off from our studies to travel south to visit the ancient capital, Kyoto. The palace of Nijoo Castle is one of the places I will never forget. It has a curious security feature – the so-called “Nightingale Floor” – a true marvel of engineering, especially considering that it was constructed in 1603. When one walks across the wooden floor of one section of the palace the floor makes chirping noises. It was constructed this way so that no one could sneak into the castle without alerting the inhabitants. In a stroke of ingenuity, nails on the underside of the floorboards rub against stones underneath, making a sound very much like the Japanese nightingale. The stones literally sing.

“If these disciples were silent, the stones would shout out.”

The Old Testament speaks often of creation proclaiming the glory of God. Trees clap their hands for joy, the hills skip into a dance, the waves cry out, and the mountains shout. The Bible teaches that matter can sing.

“If these disciples were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Several months after our dog Caesar came to live with us, we discovered he has a curious talent. Some of you have seen his YouTube video. Only about 10 days after his first YouTube videos were posted he became a YouTube star, and was featured at the web site “Scottish Terrier and Dog News” for his amusing talent.

We discovered Caesar's talent because John Mark's computer plays Beethoven's “Ode to Joy” every Sunday morning. One Sunday morning, quite unbidden and much to our surprise, Caesar began to “sing” along with the music.

Caesar seemed to be quite selective in music. We couldn't get him to replicate this talent with any other music. Then that October we took him and our other dog, Al, to the Blessing of the Animals service at Redeemer, where we were then members. During the children's choir anthem, Caesar once again chose to display his vocal talents, singing along with the children.

“If these disciples were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Our Thursday evening Bible study class has been digging into the book of Romans. One thing the apostle Paul said is that the pagans, even though they don't know God *per se*, have knowledge of God. All they have to do is look around them at the witness of creation. All of creation speaks to the glory of God.

“If these disciples were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Palm Sunday is one of the most “political” Sundays of the year. On this day there is a question before the church: “Who is in charge? Who rules?”

As Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, bouncing in on the back of a donkey, his followers and admirers clip palm branches from the trees, waving them as he comes before them. This waving of palm branches is a sign of welcome and hospitality. Many in the crowd began to shout, “Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna, to the king!”

Jesus' critics are obviously unnerved by this political demonstration. They have worked out an arrangement between the faith of Israel and the power of Imperial Rome. During Jesus' earthly life, it is estimated by scholars that there were at least 60 armed rebellions against the Roman occupation forces. The Pharisees do not want the common political fanatics to disrupt the alliance that they have constructed with Rome. So they say, “Tell your people to shut up.” They want Jesus to tame the outburst, to tone down the uproar. People waving palm branches and shouting was a threatening sign, particularly when they were shouting that there was a new king in town.

Upon receiving the demand that he tell his followers to be quiet, Jesus says something 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.

Where John Mark and I live – Picatinny Arsenal – is a virtual wildlife preserve. We frequently see all sorts of wildlife, everything from the common squirrels, ground hogs, deer and chipmunks to hawks, foxes, wild turkeys and bear. When we first moved there I relished the thought of some blissful peace and quiet, a stark contrast to the busy suburb we had left in Northern Virginia, which was only a few miles short of the runways at Dulles Airport. I quickly learned, however, that simply standing in our back yard one is inundated with the cacophony of nature. All of nature is alive with sound. Long before daylight, the creatures begin calling to one another. Throughout the night, there are various cries, rustling and scuffling. No way that you could shut up all of the stuff. God has made even the material universe to sing, to speak up, to testify.

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Those who want to keep a lid on things, those who have a stake in the *status quo* and the present order, always try to keep things quiet. They don't like noise and commotion. When Jesus entered into Jerusalem, he was entering the town as a king, a new ruler, an adversary who threatened the throne. The disciples began to praise and shout hosanna, something that really threatened the powers that be. “Be quiet!” said the authorities. And Jesus said, “If you silenced them, even the stones would shout.”

Does Jesus not say, “Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, shall make me ashamed of him”? Does Jesus not 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?

It appears to be the nature of this God to have a witness, to enable testimony. The disciples on Palm Sunday looked at Jesus and saw who he really was. He was coming into town to take charge. He was riding in on the back of a donkey to rule. And they shouted that their deliverance was at hand. And when these 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.

It is the nature of this God always to have a witness, always to raise the dead, always to have somebody to testify and tell the story. There are people in this congregation who think they are not good at public speaking. There are people right 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. I'm not calling you a "stone" but I am saying that your testimony is in itself proof of the power of God to have God's word spoken to a disbelieving word.

Jesus said that he could make even the stones to shout if the shouting people around him were silent. 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 settled arrangements, here's what I hear the stones saying: "Follow him! Join the parade of those who through the ages have looked at this carpenter's son bouncing in on the back of a donkey and seen their Lord and their Savior. Jesus Christ is Lord! Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

Amen.

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