

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Luke 19:28-40

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Rev. Irene Pak Lee

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Even the Stones Will Shout

Back in January, the New York Times posted an article that was circulated widely among my circle of friends. The article was entitled “These mothers were exhausted, so they met on a field to scream.” The title said it all. A group of mothers in Boston, exhausted by the toll of the pandemic, working from home, and parenting quickly accepted the invitation of organizer Sarah Harmon, a therapist and mother, who organized the gathering to meet on a football field at a local high school just to scream. The article shared that their voices which carried years of pain and rage were able to be finally released, and that it was a cathartic experience for all those who participated.

Harmon shared, “The scream resonated for people because it normalized their anger...It’s been very powerful and quite healing.” She said she wanted to provide a space to just scream-to give this group of women and moms permission to give themselves the release that they really needed after years of pent up angst, frustration, and fatigue.

This article resonated with several of my friends and myself because the thought of being given permission to “lose control” within the bounds of some kind of decency and order sounded and still sounds amazing. Holding it together or pretending to hold it together can only last so long and I can imagine a long or repeated permission to yell and scream into the open sky would be a great release of all that is pent up inside.

You and I know that these years of the pandemic have not only taken its toll on working mothers, but it’s taken a toll on everyone. I imagine that given a space to yell and scream in order to release any kind of pain, weight, or hardship we have going on in our lives might sound kind of good to others too. Now I know that some of you cannot imagine losing that kind of control even for a few minutes, but when your body and soul has held added weight and lament for an extended period of time, wouldn’t it be nice to release it?

And so here we are. Another year, another Lent, and we find ourselves standing again on the edge of Holy Week where we are invited to walk with Christ through his final days. But before we get to the hardest part of the journey, we begin with a parade, with Hosannas, and with shouts of joyful praise for the One who comes in

the name of the Lord. In Luke's version, not only do we hear the familiar story of Jesus coming into this celebration on a colt, a donkey, but in this telling, the Pharisees are so appalled by the crowd's joyous and loud praise and shouts that they are almost begging Jesus to make them stop.

It's too loud. It's too much. It's drawing too much attention. It's not proper. It's embarrassing. People are traveling and gathering in Jerusalem from all over the world on pilgrimage for the Passover and this man Jesus is drawing *too* much attention to himself. "Teacher, order your disciples to stop," the Pharisees plead. And Jesus responds to them by saying, "I tell you, if they were silent, even the stones would shout." Even the stones would shout.

Now friends, when you're part of a faith community called the *Stone Church of Willow Glen*, I can't help but think of *us* when I hear the verse that even the stones would shout. For those of us here in the physical space, we are in a building surrounded by stones, and we've heard from Mary Jo through some of the history of this place that even the ways in which each stone is placed around us is done with intention, precision, symbolism, and care. And so, imagine with me, if *these* stones could speak, if they could shout, what is it that they would tell us? What would these stones say about what they have seen and known of all those who have walked in through these doors and sat in these pews?

I imagine that weight, lament, and grief is part of what is also being released in today's gospel lesson as the people shout Hosanna with joy. The people gathered that day at the Mount of Olives believed that this man Jesus would truly be the one to save them-save them from their pain, their oppression, from their anguish. They had seen him heal and perform miraculous acts-*surely*, he was coming into Jerusalem on that donkey to do the same. Seeing Jesus gave them courage to give voice to the deep feelings inside of them. And so they shout Hosanna, they rejoice, they believe.

The root of the word courage is *cor*-the Latin word for heart-and so the word courage originally meant to speak one's mind by telling all of one's heart. And so these people were shouting as individuals and as a collective with courage. They were shouting and speaking the voice of their heart.

They dared to do so because they had been witness to this man and his healing, his teaching, his feeding...his love for them. And although we always frame this day as joyous, as a celebration of Christ and then juxtapose it with the betrayal and death of Christ later in the week, the truth is, the people shouting Hosanna that day already came with an undefinable mix of hope and despair, of desperation and perhaps an obstinate urge to right what had been wrong...they were shouting out to the person

who they saw would and could defeat their oppressors. They thought their long nightmare and crisis was ending with Jesus. And it would. It just would not be in the way they expected.

HOSANNA! HOSANNA! You may know by now that that word isn't just a shout of praise but it means SAVE US, SAVE NOW. HEAL US, HELP US! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! HOSANNA! SAVE NOW. SAVE US. These shouts came from places deep within-shouting it must have felt cathartic.

Friends, what would you be shouting if you were on that path and saw the one who could change everything? Would you remain silent? Or would you have also shouted out to him?

We continue to live in times where we may be bewildered at what is happening in the world around us and in our own personal lives. As things start returning to a "new normal" after years of pandemic life, I am sure things are surfacing for each of us that we did not even know was there. The truth is, things are not normal anymore, they are different. Things have changed. If these stones could speak, what would they say about what they know about us now?

The cries of those who have been oppressed have been shouting for a long time. If your body and soul has lived that reality, then you already know and you're probably really tired. And if you are surprised, shocked or disturbed by what you see and hear in the news of continued violence against our siblings of color, our queer siblings or any marginalized group...then I pray that you will take that shock, that surprise and that disturbance to join in the cry of Hosanna. Join the shouts, SAVE NOW-SAVE US. God, save us all! HOSANNA! Save us from hatred, save us from gun violence, save us from war, save us from ourselves! Save me from my grief, save me from my broken heart, save me from my aging body, save me from pain. We believe-help our unbelief.

Scripture tells us that even the stones will shout. And so today, I want you to reflect for yourself and for the wider community, what is it that cannot be silenced? What must be said? What is bubbling up that we need to give voice to-whether it's faith questions, apologies, issues of justice or truth telling? Because when Jesus says even the stones will shout, he is telling us that all of creation cries out with praise...and that message will rise above to a God who will receive it and hear it, even if the oppressive powers want to silence it. We can come to God in this moment in freedom and as we fully are.

Friends, we need to call upon our God to draw on the courage that we need. Courage to rest and recharge for the work ahead and also to move forward, even in the midst

of great resistance, toward and on the path God is calling us into. And if we truly follow in the footsteps of Christ, that path is going to be filled with despair and hope. It's going to lead to places that feel like failure, weakness, humility. It's going to lead us to a cross. To a place that feels like death.

But friends, here is the good news for us this day. The good news for you and for me is that even in the face of death, even at the cross, even when our shouts change from Hosanna to Crucify, in the words of the psalmist, God's steadfast love endures forever. God's steadfast love endures.

Today, I invite you to reflect and to give voice to your pain, to have the courage to speak your mind by telling your heart. Don't be afraid to shout out. Today is the day for shouting. You see, Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen. God in Christ knew and understood the suffering, oppression and long standing history of pain of humanity firsthand...and because of love, because of the courage to love, he walked into this Holy Week. Today is a day for hope filled praise. Even the stones will shout. So Stone Church, as I close, I want to invite us to end with shouting Hosanna as an embodied way to release all that is within us. Even the stones will shout. So will you shout? Do you think you could do that with me? Take a moment and reflect on what it is you are holding, what you need to release, what pent up frustration, fatigue, and pain you might be holding, and I want us to shout to our God. So take a moment, and then I am going to count to 3 and then we will all shout Hosanna 3 times. Those of you at home, I invite you to do the same. Take a moment now (silence). Are you ready? 1, 2, 3...HOSANNA, HOSANNA, HOSANNA!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

We believe. Help our unbelief. Amen.