

Sermon 20 March 2016 Palm Sunday
“Palm Sunday- what do the stones cry?” Philippians 2:5-11 Luke 19:28-40

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord. Amen

“If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.” Jesus words that day were **carved into** the memories of those around him. “**If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.**” *Have you*, like me, *wondered* about these words? I mean they are a part of our regular ‘church – Easter – faith story.... But...?’

But what **was** Jesus *actually* talking about? Talking Stones at Easter? **No**, not really, Oh, scholars point out that in a cosmic / nature / creation sense he did mean that what was happening at “Easter” was part of the Creator’s creation; that what was happening **was** going to be told for ever more; that what the Pharisees wanted would **never** happen; the Easter story **will** be cried out – forever more – in every way possible to the Creator, ... – *so that does include the ‘stones’*. cV

“if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

“**If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.**” When I asked you to listen to Luke’s words, did you (*I cheat outrageously because I have them written in front of me for at least a week longer than you do!*) but did you ‘hear’/ did you ‘read’ the stones “**will**”. It is not often Jesus as prophet is seen so clearly, but here he is speaking into the future; of the whole world, including all creation where the stones will cry out. Cv

Sometimes, when someone says something, it gets stuck – deep into your memory. *Sometimes* that’s not good – bad – hurtful – unlike the child’s “sticks and stones” nursery rhyme – **words can** hurt ‘me’. It can take a lot of practise, grace and even forgiveness to replace bad ‘words’ and their poison in our memories. *But today* these words aren’t ‘bad’ – but they **got stuck deep** into a listening witness’s memory. And when Luke was gathering material for his version of Jesus life, **‘they cried out’** and got recorded for us. The story **will** be told, *even if* we become Pharisees, wanting silence – the stones **will** cry out. cV

Did the Pharisees want silence? Absolutely! “**Rebuke**”^{*1} they cry out; “Jesus **rebuke** your disciples”. And by “Rebuke” they meant “**make them stop.**” Make them keep silent, stop the noise, **stop** the ‘*whole* crowd of your disciples ‘joyfully praising God in loud voices for all *the miracles they have seen*’^{vs37}. Cv

In a story-twist, the only ones silenced in Luke’s story are the Pharisees. This is the *last time* they involve themselves with Jesus^{*1}. The other religious, wealthy and probably much more politically involved Sadducees; (who controlled the Sanhedrin (Jewish people’s governing body)) are involved in the next few days, but from now on after the Pharisees try to stop the ‘noisy, joyful celebrations’ *they’re gone*. cV

Jesus silenced the Pharisees – but they had a point *didn’t they?* They might even have been motivated for good reasons – for the safety of the lives of the crowd of singing disciples... and they were certainly concerned for their own lives, and for the peace of Jerusalem.

Luke doesn’t want *us* – *listening so long after he wrote it all down for us*; Luke doesn’t want us to forget that ‘peace’ was an essential ingredient of today – Palm Sunday’s picture. **As Jesus death approaches**, Luke brings to a close the circle of Jesus’ life story. Only in Luke does the ‘whole crowd of disciples’ sing out:^{vs38} “...**Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!**” What the angels sang at Jesus birth, his disciples sing at his death; what the angels knew at his birth, his disciples know at his death. cV

The peace Jesus brought was worth singing about; worth celebrating, worth risking your life for – because to live without it was not really living. It was just existing, breathing, **living, real living** is what Jesus disciples knew happened, (happens) when we accept Jesus, receive his teachings, follow his way. And on that day so long ago, the peace that settles deep into the heart when accepting Jesus – **was worth** singing in the street! Cv

And that is one of the problems – *if* we are standing alongside the Pharisees for a moment. *If* we could transport ourselves back to be witnesses of this **strange** street parade. On one hand we have Luke's witness that it is Jesus 'whole crowd of disciples' singing in the street – only Luke refers to the crowd as being all – **disciples**, - not just *gathered Passover travellers* ascending into Jerusalem city who are caught up with Jesus donkey ride... But with Jesus on that donkey ride is the whole crowd of **his** disciples...

If we were there, we would also know that at Passover in Jerusalem, more often than not – **Pilate** would be arriving, with reinforcements, to “**keep the peace**”. Marching in ^{*2} *on the other side of town*, - **not** on a *donkey!!!* But arriving with troops and flags and weapons; with all the signs of empire; and he would be riding in on a magnificent **warhorse**, in case the flags and weapons and troops weren't enough to intimidate and display 'his' power and intention to keep the peace. cV

It's a *different* expression of peace – isn't it! Luke has '**Jesus peace**' described, when he quotes Psalm 118: 38 – and Luke makes one small change. Mark by the way, quotes the Psalm exactly! Luke changes “the One” to “the King”. We use Mark's version for our communion. We all say 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord' ... But Luke wrote: ^{vs38} “Blessed is **the king** who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” **For Luke, Jesus is King** and his kingdom is defined by the peace it establishes.

The famous 'Roman 'Pax' / peace? Taken to countries (occupied) and held in place by an incredible war machine; symbolised for us today by Pilate's march into Jerusalem. Or Jesus' peace, pictured by his riding a donkey into Jerusalem, with nothing but love to keep it going? cV

Mahatma Gandhi, 20th century ^{*2}: "The day the **power of love** overrules the love **of power**, the world will know peace." The day the power of love overrules the **love of power**, the world will know peace." Cv

The day **we are remembering**, Jesus was the power of love; his disciples sang of the peace they knew; Luke wrote of the kingdom being established – and *the lovers of power* shuddered, plotted, and committed themselves to stopping the arrival of God; God's kingdom; **God's reign on earth – in Jesus**. ^{*3}But 'this arrival of God will not be resisted or stopped. It can only be received and enjoyed.'

“The heart of our Palm Sunday this year is about God coming to God's people in faithfulness and love. Jesus rides into Jerusalem as the one who will suffer and this is the doorway to his passion, but it is in his suffering all people are invited into God's grace and presence.” ^{*3} cV

It is ^{*3} **Jesus'** response that defines for Luke his understanding of God's salvation that comes in Christ Js. God's Reign, is for Luke the same as God's salvation, and **the reality** into which all those who are saved" are brought, and **is unstoppable**. It can only be received, enjoyed and sung about! cV

It is both *personal and social*, and it is as concerned with justice just as much as with personal restoration and forgiveness. When Jesus replied to the Pharisees that even the stones would cry out, Jesus says God's Reign will not be silenced by the powers that be, **and it includes** the **whole of creation**. When God's 'Sent One' comes, the entire created order knows it, **responds to it**, and knows that the arrival of this sent one – is another beginning and this fresh start begins with Jesus saying 'Be not afraid, Peace....'

We were not watching like the Pharisees, that day – but **we are** among his disciples now. And Jesus' has this expectation that we will not keep silent – we **will cry** out: 38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” Because just like the early disciples – **who were there** – **we've seen** his miracles. cV

It says in the words of our next song, he makes something new out of us, this is at the heart of Easter – he makes something beautiful, out of us, and every time that happens it's a miracle in my book! Let's joyfully sing! Amen