

“The Stones Would Shout Out”

Luke 19:28-40

Richard C. Allen

South Glastonbury

April 14, 2019

Connecticut

I would love to have been in the crowd that day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. I'd like to believe I would have been among those laying down the palm branches and shouting, “Hosanna!” It's not hard to picture the local authorities standing on one side of the parade route, **grumbling**. For certain local officials, Jesus represented a threat to their authority. They witnessed large crowds following him and rejoicing with him, and cheering for him as if he were the Messiah! When these local officials had seen enough, they confronted Jesus, insisting he silence the crowd. “Tell your people to tone it down!”

To this insistence, Jesus replies calmly: “Even if I could silence their enthusiasm, the stones would shout out!” The stones would take up the chant! In other words: There will be no stopping this new thing God is doing! There will be no turning back.

On the Confirmation Retreat two-weeks hence, we'll be teaching the students to sing that old Gospel hymn from the Church of India: I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back. That's what we witness on Palm Sunday morning. God has initiated the Gospel of love; God has called us to accept the cost and the joy of discipleship. And there's no turning back, no turning back.

Earlier in the Gospel narrative, Jesus had been explaining the high cost of following him and living into his teachings. And many were turning away from following him because the sacrifice seemed too overwhelming. Then, in a moment of intense drama, Jesus turned to the twelve and said, “How about you? Will you also turn away from following me?” It was one of those moments when a line is drawn in the sand. Are you with me or not? And Peter, speaking for the twelve, blurts out loud, “To whom could we turn? For THOU hast the words of eternal life.”

Fifty years ago this May, we attended the Baccalaureate service the evening before our graduation from Trinity University. I don't recall the hymns we sang or the prayers we prayed. But I do recall the text from the preacher's sermon. He read aloud, “To whom could we turn? For THOU hast the words of eternal life.” Those words penetrated by heart, landed somewhere in my soul, and remain with me to this day. For me, from that day in May 1969, there was no turning back.

I've come to think of Palm Sunday as one of those 'draw a line in the sand' occasions. Are you in? Or not? There's no turning back.

I mentioned the grumblers standing to one side of the parade route that Palm Sunday morning. I suppose there will always be grumblers. The authority of the Gospel will always be a challenge to other authorities. There will always be those who insist on leading by fear or by intimidation or by hate. There will always be authorities who bring out the worst in people, who play on our insecurities, who seek to take advantage of our vulnerabilities.

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a different kind of authority. This Gospel offers to lead by a servant's humility, by an assumption that love casts fear aside, and by a belief that God came into the world so that we could ALL experience an abundance of life!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a different kind of authority. Even if someone could put a gag order on Jesus, the stones would cry out!

In a way, this is why I live each day in the greatest of hope. There are lots of things "out there" to fear. There are many voices that de-value the power of love to cast out fear. There are many voices that don't believe that faith has the power to move mountains. I am one of those who believe. There will be no silencing the Gospel of love. It's the authority on which I stand. And I invite you all to stand with me.
Amen.