

## *Rocks and Tears*

**Luke 19:36** As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.<sup>37</sup> As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen,<sup>38</sup> saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"<sup>39</sup> Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop."<sup>40</sup> He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."<sup>41</sup> As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it,<sup>42</sup> saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side.<sup>44</sup> They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."

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Today is Palm Sunday, the day that we traditionally celebrate Jesus' spectacular entry into Jerusalem. It's usually a day when worship is especially joyful. We might wave palm branches. We sing triumphant hymns. We try to put ourselves in the crowd of people that lined the path from the Mount of Olives to the massive gates in the wall of Jerusalem. People are throwing their cloaks on the pathway. They're cutting branches and laying them on the path. Here comes Jesus, riding on a donkey. The crowd is cheering and singing. "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" The crowd shouts "Hosanna!" over and over again. Hosanna means, "Save now!" Often, our worship on Palm Sunday ends here. We celebrate with joy but go no further down the trail from the Mount of Olives to the gates of the city. But today, let's go deeper into the scripture and farther down the trail.

"In the Gospels, something is always out of place – the rich fool dies; the neighbor is a Samaritan; the publican goes down from the Temple justified – and now the king enters the city riding on a borrowed donkey. Jesus was a king, but no ordinary one – the king of fishermen, tax collectors, Samaritans, harlots, blind men, demoniacs, and cripples. Those who followed Jesus were a ragtag bunch."<sup>1</sup>

It isn't far from the Mount of Olives to the city walls, a few hundred yards, a half-mile or so. The city of Jerusalem is filling up with people coming to celebrate the feast of the Passover. Spirits are high as people gather to remember how their ancestors were rescued from slavery in Egypt, long ago. Passover is the holiday that celebrates leaving oppression behind and becoming a free nation. But now, at the time of Christ, they're no longer entirely free. Israel is occupied territory, a part of the Roman Empire. As the Jews gather to celebrate the moment in their history when they became free, the Romans bring additional troops into Jerusalem to make sure the Jews don't try to recreate the history that they're celebrating. There have been revolts in the past among the Jews and the Romans are determined to squash any ideas along those lines.

A crowded city. A freedom holiday. A history of unrest. Nervous but determined military forces. And there on the road into town is a crowd shouting, "Blessed is the king who comes! Save now!" If they had known back then what you get by mixing charcoal, saltpeter, and sulphur, they would have said that the whole city was a powder keg waiting to explode! We celebrate this event with great joy, but back then, stomachs were churning. Oh, there was great joy along the road from the Mount of Olives in that crowd of cheering bystanders. But it made some people in the crowd nervous.

Some Pharisees in the crowd told Jesus to order his followers to stop. Why did they do this? Are they part of his opposition? Are they offended by the shouts of praise that are being raised as Jesus passes by? Or, are they afraid of trouble if the Romans see or hear this procession? Luke doesn't mention the cries of "Save now." In Luke, they sing of a king, yes, but in the same breath as they sing of peace. Which word would the Romans hear more clearly? Peace? Or King? Maybe these Pharisees just don't want any trouble with the Roman soldiers.

We tend to think of the Pharisees in negative terms, but not all Pharisees are Jesus' enemies. Back in Luke 13:31 some Pharisees warned Jesus that Herod intended to kill him. Whatever their motives, these Pharisees demand that Jesus order his disciples to stop.

Jesus replies, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." This isn't the first time that we've heard an expression about rocks that talk. Back in his day, the prophet Habakkuk said that there was so much shame and guilt in the land that even the stone walls and the woodwork were crying in shame. And earlier in his ministry, Jesus had warned his fellow Jews to not be presumptuous about their place in the world just because the blood of Abraham flowed in their veins. If God wanted to, he could raise up children of Abraham from the rocks on the ground, Jesus said.

There's a message here for us today. One of my favorite poets says it better than I ever could. Ann Weems writes:

"And how we love a parade!  
In a frenzy of celebration  
we gladly focus on Jesus  
and generously throw our coats  
and palms in his path.  
And we can shout praise  
loudly enough  
to make the Pharisees complain.  
It's all so good!

It's between parades that we don't do so well.  
From Sunday to Sunday  
we forget our hosannas.  
Between parades  
the stones will have to shout  
because we don't."<sup>2</sup>

Is that us? Do we worship our Lord on Sunday and worship everything but God the rest of the week? Is the only way that someone knows we were at church on Sunday because they spotted our car in the church parking lot? Will the stones have to shout because we are silent?

The parade down the trail continues. The donkey puts one young hoof in front of another. And then Jesus stops and begins to weep. Only twice in scripture, are we told of Christ weeping. Jesus wasn't immune to tears. He wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. When I was a boy, when we were required to quote scripture verses from memory, John 11:35, "Jesus wept" was the emergency standby if your mind went blank. Now, sitting on the young donkey, Jesus looks over the city of Jerusalem and weeps. We're reminded how Luke told us earlier that Jesus lamented over the city, saying, <sup>NRS</sup> **Luke 13:34** "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" Jerusalem, it seems, has a pattern, a history, of rejecting the prophets.

Now, on this day that we refer to as Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Jesus pauses to weep for this city and say, "Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side.<sup>44</sup> They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another;" Indeed those days did come. That's a clear description of what happened when the Jews rebelled against Rome in 70 AD. The description of the fall of Jerusalem in this passage matches the destruction that General Titus inflicted on the city in 70 AD when the temple was destroyed and Jerusalem was leveled. In fact, by the time the gospel of Luke was written, the war of rebellion was history. Jesus isn't gloating over the city. There's no feeling of "I told you so" or "It serves you right." Instead, Jesus words are filled with love and care, but also with frustration and grief.

Jesus weeps – why? – the text says it is because they have not recognized the things that make for peace. Just as in Galilee, the people in Judea resisted his call for peace, for the good news, the gospel of God's grace which would reach out in love to Jew and Gentile alike. And Jerusalem - the city whose name means vision of peace - has refused to recognize the things that make for peace, Jesus says.

When John the Baptist was born, his father, a priest named Zechariah, declared that John would go before the Lord, preparing the way, so that the light from on high might "guide our feet into the way of peace." Guide our feet in the way of peace. How did Jesus do this? He taught peace. He said, <sup>NRS</sup> **Matthew 5:9** "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Jesus, Son of God, said, "If you want to be my brothers and sisters, if you want to be called children of God, then be peacemakers." Turn the other cheek. Control your anger. Avoid revenge. Forgive over and over.

More than that, Jesus lived the life of peace. When he was traveling through Samaria, there was a village that refused to receive him. His disciples were ready to call down fire from heaven and destroy the village, but Jesus rebuked them. The night that Jesus was arrested, Matthew tells us that one of the people with Jesus drew his sword and cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest. Jesus told him to put away his sword, asking him, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?" Later that night, with his life hanging in the balance, Jesus told Pilate, "If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Jesus lived a life of peace, even at the cost of his own life.

For a short time each year, we think of Jesus and peace. We send Christmas cards hailing the birth of the Prince of Peace. We picture cobalt blue night skies with angels singing about peace on earth and goodwill toward men. But we seldom think about peace as a major issue at Easter. However, in the middle of this glorious, exuberant parade, with the crowd shouting praise and singing of peace in heaven, Jesus stops and weeps because the people do not recognize the things that make for peace. He came to guide us in the way of peace - and people don't hear or learn or accept this central theme - and it drives him to tears. Finally, the donkey moves forward again. The gates of the city stand open. "Jesus chooses to enter a deadly situation without force or protection. He gives himself freely and without reservation. This is a prophetic act, a sign of God's vulnerable love, which risks everything and promises to gain all. This is the means by which God creates peace."<sup>3</sup>

Does Jesus weep over us today because we don't recognize the things that make for peace? In our families, do we focus on our own hurts, our own wants, getting our own way - or do we seek to support and love each other? Are we quick to forgive, or quick to be bossy? Are we more concerned with our children's athletic achievements or their spiritual strength? Do we teach them to be competitive but not compassionate?

In our community, is our effort centered on our best interests - or on the common good? Are we pleased when our street is repaved, but mutter about government waste when a street is repaved in another neighborhood? Do we compete for the city's limited resources - or try to find ways to share them fairly? Do we gripe about our taxes - without ever considering the tax burden that others bear? Are we more likely to talk about government as "they" - instead of as "us"? Do we expend as much energy in finding ways for harmony to prevail - as we do in winning arguments and getting the upper hand?

Jesus wept because they didn't recognize the things that make for peace. Is Jesus weeping today over us? Are we really children of God? Are we peacemakers? Amen.

<sup>NRS</sup> **Luke 13:31** At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

<sup>NRS</sup> **Habakkuk 2:9** "Alas for you who get evil gain for your houses, setting your nest on high to be safe from the reach of harm!"<sup>10</sup> You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life.<sup>11</sup> The very stones will cry out from the wall, and the plaster will respond from the woodwork.

<sup>NRS</sup> **Luke 3:8** Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

<sup>NRS</sup> **John 11:35** Jesus began to weep.

The way of peace <sup>NRS</sup> **Luke 1:76** And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,<sup>77</sup> to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.<sup>78</sup> By the tender

mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us,<sup>79</sup> to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

<sup>NRS</sup> **Luke 9:52** And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him;<sup>53</sup> but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem.<sup>54</sup> When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"<sup>55</sup> But he turned and rebuked them.<sup>56</sup> Then they went on to another village.

<sup>NRS</sup> **Matthew 26:51** Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.<sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."<sup>53</sup> Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

<sup>NRS</sup> **John 18:36** Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

<sup>NRS</sup> **Isaiah 9:6** For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke, NIB, vol IX*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1995) p 370

<sup>2</sup> Ann Weems, "Between Parades," *Kneeling in Jerusalem* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 1992) p 69

<sup>3</sup> William G. Carter, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 2* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2009) p 156