

West Valley Church
Michael W. O'Neill
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Palm Sunday

Many of you know that, before coming here to West Valley ten years ago, my family and I lived in the great little town of Mountain Home, Idaho, where I was the pastor of our Nazarene Church there for over 10 ½ years. There were a lot of great things about living in Mountain Home, but one of those was the annual “Air Force Appreciation Day” parade. There is a large Air Force base outside of Mountain Home, so the town would throw a big parade at the end of August or early September each year. This parade was the largest parade in all of Idaho, taking over three hours, with all kinds of floats from people and churches and businesses in town and from out of town, people running for office, State representatives and Congress, people from the Base (many different squadrons had floats), National Guard tanks and equipment, on and on. Then, in the little park in the middle of town, the city would provide BBQ beef sandwiches, corn on the cob, a bag of chips and a drink. They would feed over 10,000 people, and there were only 7000 people who lived there! The kids would bring large sacks with them because every float would throw out candy, and they would fill their bags with it. There was a Costco in Boise that had a float every year, except they didn’t throw out candy, they threw out something else. You’ll never guess; they threw out rolls of Costco toilet paper! Can you believe it?! (sigh) Oh for the days when you could get toilet paper thrown at you in a parade!

All four Gospels record a great parade into Jerusalem: the arrival of Jesus during the Passover; it is what has been called “the Triumphal Entry.” It really is somewhat of a parade, but there is only one float – a one-party parade – and that party was also the grand marshal of the parade – Jesus, riding on a young donkey.

Like I said, all four Gospels tell this story, so it’s pretty important. But Luke gives an additional detail that I want us to see. So, if you would, turn in your Bibles or in your app to Luke 19:28-44, pause this video and read it aloud. I’d like you to pause this video and read that passage, and pay special attention to verse 40.

Go ahead now....

That sounded like quite a parade, didn’t it? It was sort of a first-century parade and flash mob all in one. This is sort of a strange passage because, even though we are very familiar with the story, it’s kind of confusing; why is it there? What’s with the donkey? What was the beef with the religious rulers? And why did the people who were so excited and passionately singing the praises of Jesus, suddenly turn just a few days later and demand that Jesus be crucified?

And what does all that have to do with stones singing praises?

This story is recorded in all four Gospels; it is significant to Jesus’ story, and it is significant to our story – especially right now.

Luke writes this story in a pretty genius way. Luke has built up Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem as full of significance. He’s been building and building the story and the tension to this

moment – the entry into Jerusalem – the capital city of God’s people, and it is the city of Jesus’ fate and destiny.

Jesus arrival *should* be the pinnacle, the climax of the story. The triumphal entry should be the happy ending to the narration that Luke has been telling. The triumphal entry should be the victory parade for Jesus; the crowds praise him, they declare him their king, coming into the capital city. This is the one who will finally return the promised land to the Jews. This is their Messiah that will wrest control from the Romans and return the government to the Jewish people. Jesus’ arrival follows prophecy; the prophets said he would arrive on a colt, that people would shout their praises to him. Surely, this means that he is about to become king! The people have spoken; they’ve declared their hosannas and hallelujahs; they’ve decided that they want Jesus to be their king. So they throw a parade along the cobble-stoned street. They lay the cloaks in front of Jesus like a red carpet. They wave palm branches – a kind of ancient organic confetti. All these things are symbolic of a king. He’s even a king of peace because he’s riding a young donkey – symbolic for peace, unlike a horse, which is symbolic of war. The people see that Jesus is going to bring them the peace that they want; political peace with no more of the oppressive rule of the Romans. The fact that everyone thinks Jesus is a political king is clear, because the religious rulers, who have the political power, are threatened by Jesus and this parade. They try to tell Jesus that he should silence the crowds and stop them from shouting out his praise, because they don’t want to give up any of their political power.

Then the story turns on a simple statement that seems strange: Jesus says, “If the people stop shouting, the very stones will burst into cheers!”

Don’t miss this turning point in the story. It shifts from palm branches and parades and the people’s plan to God’s plan and true praise. Instead of the parade being the climax of Jesus’ story, it becomes a tragic downhill tale as the people will soon quickly turn on him and kill him.

What Jesus said about the rocks represents a couple of things. First, Jesus’ statement about the rocks crying out should have reminded the religious rulers of Habakkuk 2:11. Habakkuk was an Old Testament prophet during the time that God’s people were overpowered and taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Habakkuk is upset by all this, so he seeks answers from God. Habakkuk wants to know where God is in all of that, and what God intends to do to rescue his people. He actually complains to God about what’s going on. So Habakkuk goes out, climbs a high tower, and listens to hear the Lord’s answer. And finally, God answers and reminds Habakkuk that these man-made kingdoms will eventually fall, that those who are sinful will not stay in power forever. In fact, God says that they are so guilty that, in 2:11, “The very stones in the walls cry out against you, and the beams in the ceilings echo the complaint.” The stones themselves will convict the unrighteous.

In other words, one thing Jesus is pointing out by saying that the rocks will cry out, is that the religious rulers should realize they are actually unrighteous and that they need to repent. The praise coming from the rocks should have been a sober reminder of their own sinfulness.

And then the second thing the rocks mean is this: while the peoples’ praise was misplaced, they *were* correct in shouting the truth that Jesus is *THE* King; a statement so true that even

the rocks recognize it – along with all creation. The rocks and everything else in creation tell us about God.

Job points this out:

“Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.” (Job 12:7-10)

And Psalm 19:1 - “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”

The Apostle Paul points out that creation itself declares God’s glory, so we have no excuse not to name Jesus as King and praise him:

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20)

But the people missed the message of the rocks; their attention was on the noise and the parade and their selfish ambitions. The rocks know the real story; the rocks see past the parade to the Prince of Peace. The people love the parade. But long after the shouts are silenced and the confetti is swept up and blown away by the winds, the rocks remain. I’ve walked the stones of the original streets of Jerusalem. They are not the cute cobblestones that you think of in nice New England country sides. They are large boulders laying side by side, wedged with dirt so tightly packed that it is like concrete. You can’t pick up these stones; they are as wide as manhole covers all the way around them. These stones won’t shift under the weight of Roman chariots. The stones are still there in Jerusalem; some of them uncovered by archeologists, and they are *still* in the very same places. Long after the parade, the praise from the rocks remains.

The parades made by people are full of noise and fast answers and false kings full of pomp and pageantry.

The parade of providence is silent and slow, and seems to end in pain and misery; the rocks support the King on his way to being tortured and crucified, dead and buried. But – soon, another rock would be rolled away...

The people praised their perception of a political king, while the stones praised the slow, sure work of a suffering savior whose sacrifice saved the world. Because soon, another rock would be rolled away...

Parades create false praise. Creation reflects God simply by its existence. Rocks continue to cry out the Creator’s praise.

Here’s the point: by now you’ve been home for over three weeks – nearly a month of staying inside your house. And now we hear that this will continue until at least May 4th. You might feel like you are stuck, missing out on whatever exciting things you think you should be doing. You might feel stuck, like a rock in the road as the parade passes you by. But stop looking for the parade and start listening to the rocks. Let them point out any unrighteousness in your life, and then join in their praise.

Don't focus on the temporary circumstances; start letting your life be praise to God. Don't get caught up in confetti; seek to be a stone. Focus not on the temporary but the permanent. Let your very existence declare the praise of God. Do all you can to use this time to be right with God, and let your life praise God from exactly where you sit – just like the rocks.

Remember, rocks have a big role to play in the story of Jesus, because there's another rock that was rolled away...

So here's what I'd like you to do: sometime this week, go outside your home and find a rock – like this one. I found this in our flowerbeds, but you can find them maybe by digging a little bit in your flowerbeds, or in a nearby field. Make sure it's about this size and shape. That's your homework; find a rock and hang onto it this week. Put it in a prominent place to remind you to search your heart, get right with God, and start praising God in everything – you are like a rock. Burst into cheers to Jesus. Let your very existence glorify God.

Then, hang onto that rock, because you are going to need it next week for our Easter service; we are going to do something meaningful with them.

Pray

Please, pause this video and get your communion elements ready so that we can share in the Lord's table together.

Communion

Remember that the rocks in the road that Jesus travelled took him to his last supper with the disciples, and from there to his arrest, and torture, and crucifixion, then died and was buried.

The Communion Supper, instituted by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is a sacrament, which proclaims His life, His sufferings, His sacrificial death, and resurrection, and the hope of His coming again. It shows forth the Lord's death until His return.

The Supper is a means of grace in which Christ is present by the Spirit. It is to be received in reverent appreciation and gratefulness for the work of Christ.

All those who are truly repentant, forsaking their sins, and believing in Christ for salvation are invited to participate in the death and resurrection of Christ. We come to the table that we may be renewed in life and salvation and be made one by the Spirit.

In unity with the Church, we confess our faith: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. And so we pray:

Holy God,

We gather at this, your table, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, who by your Spirit was anointed to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, set at liberty those who are oppressed. Christ healed the sick, fed the hungry, ate with sinners, and

established the new covenant for forgiveness of sins. We live in the hope of His coming again.

On the night in which He was betrayed, He took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, gave it to His disciples, and said: "This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Likewise, when the supper was over, He took the cup, gave thanks, gave it to His disciples, and said: "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me."

And so, we gather as the Body of Christ to offer ourselves to you in praise and thanksgiving. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these your gifts. Make them by the power of your Spirit to be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the Body of Christ, redeemed by His blood.

By your Spirit make us one in Christ, one with each other, and one in the ministry of Christ to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

And now, let's pray the prayer that Jesus gave us to pray. We will use the word "debts" in the place that is sometimes translated "trespasses".

Our Father (*who is*) in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.' (Matthew 6:9-13)

For yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, amen. (traditional version)

Pick up the bread:

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, broken for you, preserve you blameless, into everlasting life. Eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and be thankful.

(eat)

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, shed for you, preserve you blameless into everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and be thankful.

(drink)

I want to pray for us, and then you can end this video and pray your own prayer of thanksgiving, where you are.

(pray)