

April 13, 2025

Since the end of the Christmas season, this time in the church calendar explores Jesus' ministry through the gospel, this year through the Gospel account of Luke. We've followed the slow revelation of Jesus' divine power in calming and reversing the laws of nature, as well as his ministry of calming the physical, emotional and spiritual pains of human existence. When we entered into Lent with Ash Wednesday, we continued this walk, but specifically focused on those events and teachings as Jesus set his course to the city of Jerusalem and the culmination of why he came to earth as both God and human. We've looked at ways this Lenten season on how Jesus ministered in the "in-between" of life and faith: Our human experience of good *intentions*, and the *actions* that don't always match up to those aspirations. Teaching how *strangers* can, and should, be treated as *neighbors*. The relationship between *faith* and *works*. How *rest* and *growth* are both needed to mature in our Christian discipleship. The way each of us are both *lost*, and *found*. And last Sunday, looking at the nature of *righteousness*, and how God's *mercy* brings all of us back into right relationship with God through Christ Jesus.

Today we start Holy Week, the final days from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, to his final confrontation with earthly power, his death by execution, and his triumph on Resurrection Sunday. Through the shouting of crowds, the shouting of individuals, and the shouting of the heavens, we'll experience moments of silence in between, the silence between the palms and the passion. Today we relish the shouts of joy, as well as pause in silence at the magnitude of what we are reliving in this holiest of seasons in the Church year.

Now, please rise in body or spirit for the reading of our Gospel message, from:

Second Reading Lk 19: 28-40 (NRSV)

After (Jesus) had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.' "

So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

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They replied, “The Lord needs it.” Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.

As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. Now as he was 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, saying,

“Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to (Jesus), “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the (very) stones would shout out.”

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word. **Thanks be to God!** [Please be seated.]

SERMON “everything [in] between: shouting & silence”

Shouting

Birth is not a silent event. There are the cries of the mother in the pains of labor. The urgent instructions from the midwife or doctor. The initial cries of the newborn as it experiences the disorienting light and sounds of its new life outside of the womb, sucking in air for the first time. I’m sure Jesus’ birth had all of these sounds as his human life started. But – there was another sound connected to that birth, that bridged the gap between God’s spiritual realm and the material realm, that bridged heaven and earth. Luke 2:13-14 proclaims: “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts, praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom God favors.’” In these words, shouted from the night skies, we hear and see and feel heaven breaking out onto the earthly plain. At this point I’m sure it wasn’t a silent night! These angelic shouts were letting the humble and marginalized shepherds in on the amazing news that our God, mighty and powerful, had come to earth that night in the humble body of a vulnerable newborn. The continuing saga of God’s work of salvation, coming to us now *as one of us*. A *shout* that proclaimed change is here.

Silence

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But after the birth, after the shouts from heaven and amazed shepherds, Luke tells us: "... Mary treasured all these words and *pondered* them in her heart." And her quiet, *silent* reflection continued throughout her son's childhood. Reflecting upon what this child she had brought to life would mean to the world in the words of Simeon at the Jerusalem temple: "God's salvation ... a light to the Gentiles ... a glory to Israel..." And – his disturbing prediction: "... and a sword will pierce your own soul too." Silent reflection continued with her son's own words: "Did *you* not know that I must be in *my* Father's house?" Mary pondered these things, treasured all these things that shouted the specialness of her son. She pondered them – in silence.

Shouting

Psalm 118 proclaims:

Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD....

20 This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it....

26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD....

27b Bind the festal procession with branches,....

There was shouting again on this day that Jesus prepared to enter Jerusalem. Shouting that proclaimed the arrival of a new kingly figure, shouts lifting up from the voices of those lining up along the dusty road from the Mount of Olives, the road that also led up to the great city itself. These earthly shouts echo up to the heavens, paraphrasing what the heavenly hosts shouted: "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" They paraphrase in action the words of Psalm 118, using palm branches (in the Gospel of Matthew's account), and robes as an ancient "red carpet", mimicking the entrance into cities of Roman governors and rulers like Pontius Pilate. And heard within those shouts by the devout Jewish people in the crowds would have been the prophecies of old. They would have heard in their minds the prophet Zechariah as they watched this man ride on that animal down the road to the mighty gates of Jerusalem: "Rejoice greatly O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9) The shouts pronounced a change in governance was coming. The shouts may have been heard all the way up to the great city itself, the Roman sentries in the

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watchtowers wondering what all the commotion was about – was Rome sending a new leader to govern this city in the occupied land of Judah? The shouts told everyone – change is here.

Silence

But Luke tells us there were some in the crowd who tried to silence the shouts, quiet down the crowds, saying to Jesus. “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” The religious leaders that were with Jesus on this day, a part of the group called the Pharisees, weren’t trying to silence this procession in rejection of Jesus, to keep the people from believing in Jesus as the Messiah, the new king David. At this point in Jesus’ ministry, he had a few followers that came from the Pharisees. They were probably there on the side of this dusty road because they also saw and accepted in him the fulfillment of the prophecies of old, which put them at odds with their Pharisee brethren. No, this plea for silencing was out of a protectiveness for Jesus – the Romans were going to hear this shouting and think Jesus was starting a riot! The Sanhedrin, the priests of the Temple, were going to hear this and think it was a blasphemous interpretation of the ancient prophecies! Silence was the way to protect Jesus. Keeping quiet, keeping your head down, was the way to protect Jesus and his disciples from the earthly powers that wanted to shut down Jesus and his message. They thought silence was safe.

Shouting

Almost every Sunday I’ve led worship at First Presbyterian Church in Port Huron, whether you knew where these words came from or not, we start out our worship together with a verse found in the psalm Pat read to us this morning, Psalm 118:

24 This is the day that the LORD has made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Repeat louder 3x.)

With these words, we celebrate the God that created the world, each one of us, and another day of life has been given to us by our Creator and Sustainer. We acknowledge God created the Sabbath for us, and we should honor it by gathering in God’s name with shouts of joy, with a lifting of our hearts, and glory in the opportunity to announce the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit that comforts us, guides us, and fills us with the passion that Christ himself exhibited in comforting the sick, teaching God’s love, pronouncing when injustice and wrongs are being done to the marginalized and oppressed that live among us. Everything we do as believers and as the Church should shout out the gospel message. In this

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historic building, whose cornerstone was laid in 1887, this body of Christ was built and shaped around the stone that the psalmist in 188 sung about:

22 The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

When the friendly Pharisees, the ones that were trying to protect Jesus, told Jesus to tell the crowd to stop their shouts, Jesus said to them: “I tell you, if these (people) were silent, (even) the stones would shout out.” The cornerstone the Church is built on cannot let itself be quieted, cannot be silenced. The stones of its foundation will carry on shouting even if we take the safe way and avoid conflict, avoid controversy, avoid the cross Jesus tells us we must carry to be his followers. “Jesus said to them: ‘I tell you, if these (people) were silent, (even) the stones would *shout* out.’”

Silence

In the early 1960’s, two young men, Sandy and Art, met while attending Columbia University in New York City. They quickly became best friends, having as a common bond their shared love of music and poetry. But tragedy struck one of them – Sandy suddenly lost his sight due to rare rapid onset glaucoma. Suddenly, being a student and fulfilling his aspiration of being a lawyer seemed out of reach, and he fell into a deep depression. He retreated into isolation, refusing to speak to any family or friends.

His college friend, Art, went to visit Sandy where he was living with his parents, and convinced him to return to school to him. There, Art became his constant guide, helping him to classes, reading assignments to him, helping him to obtain new skills like navigating subways and stairwells, and assisting him in filling out graduate school applications. Art nicknamed himself “Darkness”, telling Sandy “I want you to know someone is there with you, in the black, in the darkness.” Sandy went on not only to graduate from Columbia, but also achieved graduate degrees from Harvard and Oxford. He became an entrepreneur, and gave deeply from his wealth to charitable causes.

And Art? Art continued on with his poetry and music. And their friendship inspired him to write a song that arose out of his experience of being Sandy’s friend, “Darkness.” Art Garfunkel wrote this song, and recorded with another friend, Paul Simon:

“Hello darkness, my old friend
I’ve come to talk to you again
Because a vision softly creeping

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Left its seeds while I was sleeping
 And the vision that was planted in my brain
 Still remains
 Within the sounds – of silence.”

In Luke 4:42, we are told, “At daybreak, (Jesus) departed and went to a deserted place.” In Luke 6:12 we hear, “Now during those days (Jesus) went out to the mountain to pray; and spent the night in prayer with God.” Jesus often went away to isolated places, in the dark, to pray alone during his three years of public ministry. In solitude, in the silence, he conversed with God, his father in heaven, and re-fortified himself after the draining encounters and noisy crowds shouting for him to help them, shouting for him to heal them. In the darkness of night, in the early morning before dawn, he found peace. He found guidance. He found the strength to continue on.

He will go to a quiet place this coming week to again experience silence, but this time not for comfort. This time, in the silence of a dark garden, he’ll reaffirm the test he’ll go through in front of the leaders of the Temple, in front of Pilate, in front of soldiers, in front of those few that stayed around to watch him take his last breath. He will reaffirm in the silent night God’s plan to save each one of us through his suffering, death and resurrection. In his silent darkness, lays our hope.

Like our human lives, Jesus experienced moments of joy and exuberance – but also dark times of pain and frustration, grief and loneliness. In silence, he found moments of comfort, guiding him to the next steps in his ministry. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ turned earthly values and expectations upside down, with shouting coming from silent places, and silence creating sounds of joy and praise. Jesus’ began this holiest of weeks hearing shouts; in the silence later in the week, Jesus felt the presence of the One who sent him, guiding him to the words and miraculous acts that changed the course of history. Shouting with actions louder than words, actions that silenced many of his critics.

We worship God through Christ in our shouting, and in our silence. Maybe in the sounds of our silence, we can even hear the rocks shout for joy about the saving work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Maybe in the silence, we will also find God’s still, small voice guiding us to meet Jesus at the intersection of God’s mercy and our call to serve. In our shouts, and in our silence, may all glory be to the God that saves us. (moment of silence)

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