

“Ain’t No Rock”

April 13, 2025

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Luke 19: 35-44

Last week during children’s moment I shared that I used to be a rock hound. And rocks are amazing at telling stories. I used to enjoy going hiking in the woods at the end of the road where I grew up, and in a stream bed I found rocks with fossils in them that looked like seashells. Then in school they talked about that area being part of a vast ocean long ago. The rocks tell the story. Shale is formed when layers and layers of mud and dirt are compressed with such force that they turn to rock. And shale is turned to slate when heat is added, like volcanic kind of heat. If you find slate, like the old, old blackboards were made of, it tells the story of a region that had a large ocean on top of it then volcanic magma close underneath it. Geologists study the rocks of the Grand Canyon and learn what happened there thousands, even millions of years ago as the river cuts through the layers of rock history. Rocks tell us stories. Go to a cemetery and you will be surrounded by rocks that tell stories of life and death. Though rocks tell amazing stories, and their messages last much longer than I do; their message is too late. A rock can tell a flood happened, but it cannot warn you of it. It can tell you a volcano erupted, but it cannot tell you in time to get to safety. The cemetery stone can even tell you when a person died, but it can’t keep them from dying.

Our Scripture this morning tells of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem – when Jesus rode into town and the people celebrated Him as their new king. I don’t know if you noticed or not, but Luke is missing some important parts of the story. First of all, there are no palm branches. He mentions people laying their coats down before Jesus’ donkey to keep the dust down, but no mention of palms on Palm Sunday. No mention of children singing or even the word “Hosanna”. Verse 37 says Jesus was accompanied by a “whole multitude of the disciples” who “began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen.” Jesus’ followers surrounded Him and sang His praises, but Luke gives us no indication that the whole city joined them. And what the disciples said sounds more like the Heavenly Host of Christmas than a political rally, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

Now don’t get me wrong. I am not saying we should call today “coats Sunday” instead of Palm Sunday and change the lyrics to many of our songs. Matthew and Mark’s gospels fill in all those good details we cherish. But Luke focuses more on the end of the parade when the Pharisees try to be helpful and encourage Jesus to tone it down. You see Roman soldiers and spies were everywhere, and even a small spectacle like this with even a hundred people calling Jesus “king” would get their attention. And the one thing you do not want is Rome’s attention. They tended to squash anyone who tried to steal their limelight. But Jesus’ response was golden. “I

tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” Whenever I hear that line, and old gospel tune jumps into my head: “Ain’t no rock, gonna cry in my place. As long as I’m alive I’ll glorify His holy name.”

The sadness in our passage is that the advice of the Pharisees seems to have won the day. For when the parade was over, what does it say Jesus did? He wept. Starting in verse 41, “As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, 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. 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. 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.” The people didn’t recognize what they had in Jesus. They didn’t shout and sing with the disciples. They didn’t listen to and tell of “all the deeds of power that they had seen.” They were afraid. They were afraid of Rome. They were afraid others would not believe them, would not understand. They were afraid to cry out and rally around Jesus. And what happened? The stones had to tell the story. Not one stone left upon another. Less than 40 years after Jerusalem stayed silent about the amazing things God was doing in their midst, and failed to see the way of peace, they started an armed rebellion which Rome crushed, leaving the city and the temple completely destroyed. One part of one wall of the temple remained to tell the story. What we call the wailing wall. The rocks are telling the story, but not in time to change the ending.

That is because it is not the rocks’ job. It is ours. They only have to cry out when we fail. And we are failing. In Europe there are great cathedrals with stone spires reaching toward the heavens. And the rocks are left to tell the story because there is nobody inside. The people stopped “praising God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen.” They stopped celebrating aloud that Jesus “is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” They stopped telling one another how Jesus heals, how Jesus brings peace, how Jesus brings eternal life. They made their faith private. It is just me and Jesus. My children don’t need to know Him. My friends don’t need to know Him. The folks at breakfast and at work don’t even need to know that I know Him. And what does Jesus say? Verse 40, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” But by the time the stones shout out, it is too late. Well, the same thing is happening here.

Will you tell somebody about Jesus? Will you invite someone to Easter worship with you next week? For generations now, the statistics haven’t changed. Almost twice as many people come to church because a friend or family member invite them than every other reason combined. Add up every advertising campaign, every outreach ministry, every flashing church sign, everyone who moves and is looking for a church of the same denomination, everyone who finds us on the web or through the yellow pages, every t-shirt, every bumper sticker, every

newspaper article and the church's reputation in town; combine all those together and there are still almost twice as many people who come to church and come to Jesus because a friend or family member invited them. And I know, they say things like, "but I just don't believe. I would feel like a fraud, like I was lying, like I was pretending to be someone I am not." I get that, but when you were first learning to read, did you feel like a fraud because you needed help with the big words, or did you feel like you were lying by sitting on a bike with training wheels before you learned to ride it without them. We come to church to learn about God, to learn who God is, and learn what it means to believe in God. This is not a place we separate the faithful from the pretenders. This is a place we learn faith, and catch it from one another.

Palm Sunday is about Jesus' followers proclaiming the beautiful deeds of power they have seen in Jesus. All of our Lenten devotionals have done the same. They looked into their lives and found Jesus there, and shared it with us. Now it is our turn, because when the rocks have to do it, it is too late.

Mike Van Heyningen