

Straight from the "Hart"

April 2, 2023 – Palm/Passion Sunday



Sharing the journey
to know, love, and serve

Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are participating in today's time of worship by reading this service script. Our Lenten Series is called "Journey of Stones" and is very loosely based on a book by the same title, written by Steven Molin.



This is Palm-Passion Sunday. This year the emphasis is on the Palm Sunday Processional.

Therefore, we will start with a little True-False quiz to see how well you who have been around the church for a long time know some of these trivial details about the day. Only 8 questions, and don't answer out loud, keep it in your head and then you can evaluate yourself and you won't be able to evaluate anybody else.



Donna Allmond, (not pictured at piano) Kathy Novak, and Randy Bell give pre-service, offering and post service music.

Palm Sunday Quiz

1) This first one is tricky, so be careful. According to the Gospels, the people waved palm branches when Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

A) False. (Matt. 21:6, Mark 11:8, Luke 19:36, John 12:13). While hymnwriters call us to wave our branches high, none of the Gospels say the people "waved" branches, only that they placed them with garments in front of Jesus' path. John is the only one that even specifically mentions that they were palms, here he in the palm Sunday parade, he mentions only that they brought palm branches, (they could have waved them, but he doesn't say so) and then John mentions it again in Revelation, and again he doesn't say wave, only that they held them.

Palms were not native to Jerusalem, they had to import them for making buildings and for processions, esp. for the feast of Tabernacles. *They* used them in

connection with nationalism. We will talk about that a little later. So, about 200 years before this when the Maccabeans led a revolt (against the Greeks) and retook the temple, palms were a big part of that celebration and ongoing after that, it was a national thing.

2) The day of Jesus' triumphal entry was a special day for the Jews in that time.

A) True. The most official title I could find was "lamb choosing day". Each Israelite family would choose the best lamb that they would sacrifice for Passover on the tenth day of the month Nisan (our Palm Sunday). This gave them 4 days for the lamb's inspection and perfection to be seen. Jesus showed up in Jerusalem, as the Lamb of God, to be seen (and inspected) and chosen as their sacrifice for their sins. They probably didn't realize that at the time, (but maybe they did!).

<https://itisfinished.blog/2017/04/10/lamb-selection-day/>

3) By their actions, the people were publicly proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah.

A) True. When Solomon was coronated as king, he rode into the city on a mule to the shouts and praises of the people (1 Kings 1:43-45). Zechariah prophesied the Messiah would arrive the same way, riding on a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9). They anticipated Jesus was going to be their nation's new God-appointed king.

4) The fact that Jesus rode a donkey portrayed him as a warrior king.

A) False. Conquering kings rode war horses; the donkey symbolized gentle peace and humility (Zechariah 9:9-10). Jesus' entry was a stark contrast to the victory procession of the Romans, whose processions gave visions of military presence and overpowering intimidation to create submissive fear. But this king Jesus tried to make it clear that he was not the conquering nationalistic version they expected. He would bring a different kind of peace.

5) The shouts of "Hosanna!" literally means "Praise the Lord!"

A) False. Halleluia is the Hebrew word that means "praise the Lord;" Hosanna means "save us!" or "save!" Or "Please (save)" -- It's roots were a prayerful cry to God, but it was also used as an acclamation or happy greeting. So while it can be a cry of praise – the word itself does not literally mean praise. -- The Palm Sunday crowd assumed that Jesus would bring political liberation, and so it was a praise filled greeting of recognizing who they thought Jesus was and greeting him by saying "save us!" when they shouted Hosanna. Because of what they thought he was going to do for the nation of Israel.

6) The route Jesus chose for his triumphal entry was down the side of Mount Zion.

A) False. Jesus rode down the Mount of Olives which gave him an excellent view of Jerusalem, which is built on Mount Zion. According to Zechariah 14:4, Jesus will again stand on the Mount of Olives at his second coming. There are at least three more significant things about this trip to Jerusalem which ended with the procession we celebrate today – Jesus crossed the Jordan River, through Jericho, then Bethany, and to the Mount of Olives to come into Jerusalem. 1) It was the route of the Israelites when they first entered the promised land, captured Jericho and became a nation. This is significant for a people whose nation had all but disappeared under Roman rule. 2) It was the route King Solomon took when he took the throne. They that understood it saw Jesus as a king processing to establish his new kingdom, (it just wasn't the type of kingdom most of them were expecting). 3) And third, as I've said, this trip gives a scenic overview of the city, which inspires Jesus to offer a lament for the city that we will hear later.

7) When the people spread branches and garments in Jesus' path it was to pay him honor.

A) True. The people were boldly declaring that Jesus was their king, an accusation eventually written at the top of his cross. It was common in Bible times to spread garments in the path of princes and kings, especially at their coronation (see 2 Kings 9:13). Equal to the "red carpet" treatment of today...

8) The shouts of "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" were words of a Jewish hymn.

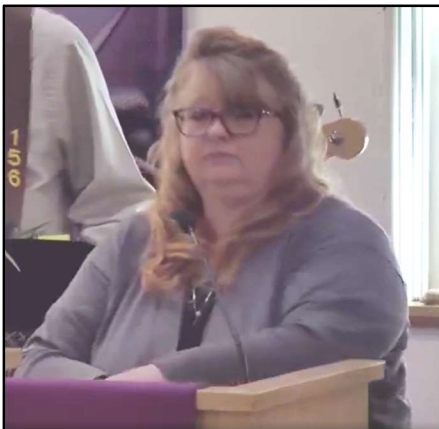
A) True. The phrases "Hosanna" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" both come from a "Hallel" (as in Hallelujah) a praise psalm or praise hymn. It is used every Passover as well as at some of the other religious feasts. These Jewish hymns would be as familiar to them as popular Christmas carols are to us. It originally meant blessed is the one who makes a pilgrimage to the temple to worship, but over time it came to mean a blessing for **thē** One who comes in God's name, and as they called it out this day -- they understood that they were naming Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior, the new King.

I hope you scored well on that – and if not – now you can... and you'll hear more detail about the event as we move through this special service.

Opening Prayer Almighty God, we have gathered because we want to celebrate the day your Son was heralded as king. With hopeful joy we want to see him enter

our hearts in peace and may these gifts of our resources and ourselves be instrumental in sharing your love with the human race. Amen.

Call to Worship Come, celebrate this day when Jesus Christ entered the holy city of Jerusalem and was proclaimed King by those who spread their garments and palm branches before him. Let the branches we hold be for us signs of his victory, and a reminder to honor him as the king who brings eternal life. (ad. from Book of Worship)



Music So let's bring him honor by putting ourselves in the story and becoming a part of the crowd that rejoices in his presence and offers him our prayers, praise, and songs.

All Glory, Laud, and Honor

Words: Theodulph of Orleans; trans. by John Mason Neale, 1831
 Music: Melchior Teschner, 1613; harm. by W.H. Monk, 1861

Refrain

All glory, laud, and honor, to thee, Redeemer, King,
 to whom the lips of children made sweet hosannas ring.

1. Thou art the King of Israel, thou David's royal Son,
 who in the Lord's name comest, the King and Blessed One.

Refrain

3. The people of the Hebrews with psalms before thee went;
 our prayer and praise and anthems before thee we present.

Refrain

5. Thou didst accept their praises; accept the prayers we bring,
 who in all good delightest, thou good and gracious King.

Refrain

Theme This is the official day that we especially give great respect and honor to Jesus for who he is and what he did for us. But there were others there that day too who did not respect Jesus and who wanted to cut him down to size. Someone reminded me of the old proverbial saying: "I am rubber and you are glue, everything you say bounces off of me and sticks to you." In some respects, that proverb plays out on this day, for it seemed like those trying to stop Jesus were getting the upper

hand, but when all is said and done, it bounced off of Jesus and he was the one who was lifted up, and the ones who wanted to tear him down were the ones who ended up being badly torn down. A children's story tells it well.

Once upon a time, long ago and far away, a man lived in a forest. There was a group who also lived there who constantly made fun of him because he was getting so old that he could not see well, or hear well, or move very well (kind of like me 😊). Whenever they saw him, they would give him a hard time just because he was old and frail. Then the king of the forest saw this and didn't like and he used his power and made it so that whatever they said to the old man would happen to them, and the man would receive the opposite. So when they came by and yelled at him "Old Fool!" the old man would get younger and smarter, and the bullies would get older and dumber. After a long time of teasing, the group figured out too late that they were the ones who were old and foolish, and the old man was young and wise and strong. (ad. from of "The Evil Goblins" by Pedro Pablo Sacristán).

We've talked about the expression "Sticks and stones..." but we know that when people say to us mean things that it hurts too. It hurts not only when we hear it – but it is hurtful to the person saying it – because they end up being mean and unhappy and unfriendly people, and those consequences almost always catch up with a person, sooner or later. Sticks and stones and rubber and glue. It reminds us to mean words and actions can hurt us – whether giving them or receiving them, and we should want to do our best to be respectful and kind to others because we respect Jesus and that is what Jesus would want us to do.

This is a day that some people saw opportunities to get their own personal agendas accomplished, others felt angry and tried to cut Jesus down to size, and some had high respect for what God was doing in Jesus, even though they may not have yet understood what exactly he was doing – yet. But they had some good clues that come from their Scriptures which we will now read responsively.

Responsive Lenten Confession

(P: Pastor, C: Congregation)

P: Open the gates that lead to the presence of the Lord, that we may enter and give him thanks.

C: He answers prayer and becomes our victorious salvation.

P: For the stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing and it is amazing to see.

C: This is the day the Lord has made. A day for us to rejoice and be glad.

P: We will rejoice greatly with all our hearts. Shout with joy! Our king is coming to us.

C: He is the Righteous One, and he is victorious.

P: And yet -- he is humble, riding on a lowly donkey's colt. He proclaims peace to the nations.

C: His rule will stretch to the ends of the earth.

P: The Lord is shining upon us. Join the pilgrimage festival with branches -- all the way to the altar.

C: Please, Lord! Save us! Please, Lord! Rescue Us! Blessed is the one who is coming, the one sent by the Lord and who comes in his name.

P: He delivers us from death because of the blood-sealed covenant he made with us.

C: We will bless him from the house of the Lord, for he is our God.

P: Give praise and thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

C: His grace and faithful loving-kindness endures forever.

Inspired from an intermix of Psalm 118:26-29, Zechariah 9:9-11 (CJB, NLT, TLB)

Music Now let's sing the story of when these words were fulfilled by Jesus.

Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

Words: Jeanette Threlfall, 1873

Music: Gesangbuch der H.W.k. Hofkapelle; 1784; ad. and harm. by W.H. Monk, 1868

1. Hosanna, loud hosanna, the little children sang,
through pillared court and temple the lovely anthem rang.
To Jesus, who had blessed them close folded to his breast,
the children sang their praises, the simplest and the best.

2. From Olivet they followed mid an exultant crowd,
the victor palm branch waving, and chanting clear and loud.
The Lord of earth and heaven rode on in lowly state,
nor scorned that little children should on his bidding wait.

3. "Hosanna in the highest!" that ancient song we sing,
for Christ is our Redeemer, the Lord of heaven our King.
O may we ever praise him with heart and life and voice,
and in his blissful presence eternally rejoice!

Intro to and Bible Reading 1

Let's back up a day. Jesus arrived in Bethany, and the home of Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead. They had a dinner in Jesus' honor. Martha served.

Lazarus ate with the others that were there, and Mary broke a 12 oz jar of expensive perfume over Jesus' feet. This led to an argument about the proper use of resources. Jesus put an end to the discussion by defending Mary, saying that what she did was for his burial. Meanwhile, a great number of people learned that they were there. They came out to see Jesus and Lazarus. Because of this, the religious leaders decided they had to kill Lazarus too, because people were deserting them. Now the story continues... **[Bold Font – Congregation]**

... The next day, the large crowd that had come for the Passover festival heard that Jesus was on his way into Jerusalem. They took Palm branches and went down the road to meet him, shouting,

“Deliver us. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel.”

After finding a donkey colt, Jesus rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said: “Daughter of Zion, don't be afraid. Look, your king is coming, riding on a donkey's colt!” ... [It wasn't until] Jesus had been glorified that the disciples noticed how many prophecies of Scripture had come true before their eyes. Many in the crowd who had seen Jesus call Lazarus back to life were telling others all about it. That was the main reason why so many went out to meet him – because they had heard about this mighty miraculous sign.

Then the Pharisees said to each other, “Look, there's nothing we can do. The whole world has gone after him.”

From John 12:12-19 (CJB, NLT, TLB)

Music The crowds flocked out to see Lazarus and Jesus and couldn't help but tell their stories. So let's also tell the story of everything Jesus has done for us by singing

I Love to Tell the Story

Words: Katherine Hankey, ca 1868 Music: William G. Fischer, 1869

1. I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story, because I know 'tis true;
it satisfies my longings as nothing else can do.

Refrain

I love to tell the story, 'twill be my theme in glory,
to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

2. I love to tell the story; more wonderful it seems
than all the golden fancies of all our golden dreams.

I love to tell the story, it did so much for me;
and that is just the reason I tell it now to thee.

Refrain

3. I love to tell the story; 'tis pleasant to repeat
what seems, each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet.

I love to tell the story, for some have never heard
the message of salvation from God's own holy Word.

Refrain

4. I love to tell the story, for those who know it best
seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,
'twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long.

Refrain

Music Today we are holding a palm branch and a crying stone. So as we prepare our hearts for prayer, let's sing a song that is probably new to most of us, which inspires us to cry out for the right things – to clearly see who Jesus is and what he has done, to teach us so that we can be close to him so that we can more accurately and devotedly follow in his ways,

Cry of My Heart

Words: Terry Butler Music: Terry Butler © 1991 Mercy/Vineyard Publishing Co.

Chorus

It is the cry of my heart to follow you. It is the cry of my heart to be close to you.
It is the cry of my heart to follow all of the days of my life.

1. Teach me your holy ways, O Lord, so I can walk in your truth.
Teach me your holy ways, O Lord, and make me wholly devoted to you.

Chorus

2. Open my eyes so I can see the wonderful things that you do
Open my heart up more and more, and make me wholly devoted to you.

Chorus

Pastor's Prayer Lord, we give you thanks today because you are good and your love never fails, and we see this over and over again. You entered Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, we have entered your presence to give you thanks. You entered Jerusalem, knowing the accolades of palms would also be the beginnings of your passion (your suffering). Yet we like to think that we would still declare you

king and want to honor you -- for while you did not become the deliverance from Rome, you did become the deliverer from the power of sin and death. You are our salvation, and you answer our prayers. Though those responsible for building religion rejected you, you became the cornerstone of those building their life on faith, for your love endures forever.

We rejoice on this Palm Sunday for your Son became the bridge through which God's light shines on us and we are granted spiritual life. We take our palms and join the festive procession into your presence, into the God that we trust. We place our time in your hands – we lift to you our joys and sorrows, our successes and our setbacks, our conquests and our challenges. As Jesus prayed before his holy week passion, so we to lift our prayers to you.

Praises and Petitions * CARDS We continue to pray for * Jan Martin requests prayers for Fannie and Ricky Williams – this is the mother-in-law of Jan's son Brian. The Williams' house burnt down and was a total loss. A neighbor got them out safely. Ricky is in a wheelchair and cannot walk. * Jan Martin's brother who is asking for prayers for his health and for his son Calvin, and the decisions they have to make, and hoping that he will be able to remain at home. * Donna Webber asks for granddaughter Jordan who is diagnosed with scleroderma, * For those impacted by the long-lasting cyclone that hit Africa's southeastern coast, and the tornadoes that hit a very under-resourced area of lower Mississippi Delta and Alabama. and those who are there in those places to help the survivors, and for others in the world facing natural disasters, or human conflict -- and the people who are there go give human aid. And for all those unnamed among us -- and beyond us -- who are recovering from illness or injury who are facing tests or loss or other types of challenges or setbacks in their lives, for these and others on our hearts and minds, we lift our prayers in this brief moment of silence. [Brief Pause] Lord, you know our faults, yet you promise to forgive. Keep us in your presence and guided by your wisdom. Restore within us the joy of your salvation. Help us to recognize your hand working in our world and transforming our hearts by the new things that you are doing, that we may experience and proclaim your love in Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray **LORD's PRAYER**

Music Children often play a key role in Palm Sunday hymns. They are specifically mentioned after Jesus enters Jerusalem, makes a prophetic style symbolic cleansing of the Temple's corruptive practices, and then proceeded to heal the blind and lame. When the religious leaders saw this and the children running

around the Temple Courts shouting what they had heard during the procession, they got bent out of shape. They asked Jesus if he heard what the children were saying – with a tone that clearly suggested that he had misled the next generation and he needed to go tell them to be quiet. Instead, Jesus quoted scripture, “Haven’t you read, “From the lips of children and infants you have called forth praise” (Sum of Matthew 21:12-16) So let’s stand if comfortable, and sing how Jesus again validates the value of yet another group that was classified as unimportant.



Tell Me the Stories of Jesus

Words: William H. Parker, 1885 Music: Frederick A. Challinor, 1903

2. First let me hear how the children stood round his knee,
and I shall fancy his blessing resting on me;
words full of kindness, deeds full of grace,
all in the lovelight of Jesus' face.
3. Into the city I'd follow the children's band,
waving a branch of the palm tree high in my hand;
one of his heralds, yes, I would sing
loudest hosannas, "Jesus is King!"

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

And now we are at the part of the story where the various groups start declaring their wishes. Remember that when the crowd heard Jesus was coming, they went out to greet him and walk with him into the city. The path of the procession gives a beautiful scenic overview of the holy city. **(Bold Font – Congregation)**

.... As he rode along, people carpeted the road with their clothing, and as he came near Jerusalem where the road descends from the Mount of Olives, the whole procession of followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God at the top of their voices for all the powerful works they had seen Jesus do.

“God has given us a King!” they exulted... “Shalom in heaven! Glory to God in the highest heavens!”.

But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said,

“Rabbi! Reprimand your disciples for saying things like that!

But he answered them, “I tell you that if they keep quiet, the stones along

the road will shout!” When Jesus had come closer and could see the city ahead, he began to weep. “How I wish you only knew today what is needed to understand the way to shalom! Eternal peace was within your reach, and you turned it down, for it is hidden from your sight and now it is too late. For the days are coming when your enemies will set up a barricade around you, build ramparts against your walls, encircle you, hem you in, and close in on you from every side... Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, for you did not recognize [and therefore] rejected the opportunity [for salvation] when God offered it by visiting you [through Me].”

Luke 19:36-44 (CJB, NLT, TLB)

Sermon Crying Stone: Cheering or Jeering

Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, and the people loved to hear and tell the story. In no small part, it was their testimony about Lazarus that gathered many in the crowd that day who wanted to see him and Jesus for themselves. So we end up with a somewhat planned and somewhat spontaneous red-carpet treatment for Jesus – who now has a rapidly growing number of followers who see him as a coming king -- a king for whom some want to sing and shout and embrace, and for others, a king they now feel obligated to silence and shun and depose. After three years of teaching and preaching and helping and healing, this climatic moment of screaming crowds marks the beginning of the end for Jesus.

But it certainly doesn't sound like it today as people shout their love for him. Imagine people laughing, crying, and hugging people they did not even know because Jesus the King had just ridden into town. Hearts were flooded to overflowing with an unimaginable hope and confidence that their lives were going to radically change for the better – almost instantly. There is no doubt that his popularity and the momentum of his movement was building and growing by the moment.

And this was especially true of the Palm bearing crowd that gathered that day. It was mentioned earlier that the palms were **JESUS USERS** a nationalistic symbol. Compare it to Independence Day Parades where the crowds line the streets with their American flags, (or the flag of whatever nation we are in on whatever day they might celebrate independence) and we wave them as the parade goes down the street. This is what they were doing with the palms, it was very nationalistic.

This group may well have misunderstood the miracle of Lazarus' new life just as other crowds had misunderstood other miracles earlier in Jesus' ministry. It was this reason that Jesus initially kept telling the healed to not go tell anyone. But they did anyway, and Jesus could hardly enter a town anymore. Crowds gather when they know a miraculous problem solver is nearby. But they don't gather for the person or the teaching or the loving, they only gather to get the quick-fix solutions. In this case they were excited because they felt they were getting Jesus the powerful miracle worker on their side, which meant Rome would fade away and the Jewish nation could return to its former glory -- a glory they hadn't seen since the golden days of Solomon's coronation when he was taking over the nation that David had built to its very pinnacle!

An example of this I've talked about a couple times since I've been here -- a large crowd in Galilee misunderstood as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish in order to care for a hungry and dehydrating crowd in the desert heat. They had missed the main point. They didn't see Jesus as a loving compassionate God who cares for every need of our life. They saw Jesus (and his people) only as a powerful resource to use -- to magically get what they selfishly wanted in that moment. On that day, it was food, on this day of palms it is national politics. On any given day it could be whatever problems we experience and solutions that we chase. Jesus did not come to be our slavish resource to fixing our problems our way.

But these are not the only ones at the parade on this day.

JESUS SILENCERS

Others were deeply concerned about the national implications of Jesus. High priest Caiaphas had just said not that very long before Palm Sunday that it is better for one man to die for the people than for the whole nation perish. (John 11:49-50) And in his mind what he was saying was: If everyone turns to Jesus in faith, if the Romans get wind of this revolutionary miracle worker, they will come in with their military efficiency and demolish the Jewish nation. They feared they were going to lose everything. So, to preserve their leadership controlling the uneasy tension of Roman politics and the people of Jewish faith, Jesus has to be killed. One dies for the sake of the many. The death of Jesus, and now Lazarus too -- was to preserve the status quo with their personal power. What he didn't realize was that he was prophetically saying that Jesus would be dying for the sake of not only the nation, but the entire world, and that is better that Jesus die for the entire world than for the world perish in its sin. He didn't even know that that is what he was saying, but he said it.

With this group, the issue is not using Jesus as a selfish resource to magically fix life. This group felt that for them personally, life was already going very well – they had resources to live well and do what they wanted, they had power over their own people, and because of that they had relative influence with the rulers of Rome – kind of like lobbyists with whom it was in Rome’s best interest to work with. They were quite content with the bubble they were living in. For these people, the problem was Jesus was bursting that bubble by pointing out the challenges of life for those who were not living among the powerful. He was going to upset their apple cart, to disrupt the world that we have. They’d say, “My values, my style of living, my power, my self-sufficiency, my self-esteem, my way of worshipping, my way of determining who is in and who is out, my solutions to all of life’s issues” – their whole way of living – they would think -- is being threatened by this “revolutionary” who is trying to open up the world’s eyes to serious issues that should and can be made better if we would only abandon the current established system in favor of a different, more gracious system with real solutions. Because of Jesus, their world was slipping out of their hands because the world is going another way while Jesus was in it.

These people agreed with Caiaphas (the way Caiaphas intended it). In a panic for this day’s crisis, they ran and told Jesus that they can’t have this noise – “it will draw the attention of the Romans. They will see it as a riot and if their military machine clamps down, it’s all over -- for all of us. So pleeeaaase stop disrupting the tenuous order that we have managed to accomplish...let’s keep the status quo intact.”

Jesus replies that if the people were quiet, the stones would cry out. Now if anyone can make a stone talk, Jesus can, but that is not what he meant. But we don’t need a real-life version of *Night at the Museum’s* Easter Island boulder coming to life and talking – For us to make this text work for us accurately. If it was that literal, then sidewalks all over America and the world would be chattering up a storm by now.

So what is Jesus meaning? In a small way, he is probably referring to the atmosphere of the day – not the physical air, the *feeling* of the day. We all understand the phrase “It was so tense you could cut the air with a knife”, right? or “Excitement is bouncing off of the walls”? You don’t literally cut air with a knife – well I supposed you do, but that is not what we mean when we say it. And emotions don’t literally bounce off walls, but we all have experienced those kinds of

atmospheres – those kinds of feelings in an area, in a room. there is no way people can be quiet in the emotion of that moment, Jesus is saying. It'd be like the stadium's favorite team scoring the winning score just as time expires – you aren't going to be able to tell the crowd to be quiet then are you? – not very successfully, anyway, right? All you sports people know that, right? It is March madness, you should know...

But even beyond the atmosphere, Jesus was referring to the Jewish faith's century's old traditional use of testimony and witness. After all, it was people's testimony about Lazarus that brought this on in the first place.

There were at least three types of perpetual witnesses in the Jewish tradition: **First**, "The Lord is a witness between you and me". A simple, direct oath between two people. **Second**, "This heap (this altar) and you pile up a bunch of stones -- will be a witness between you and me". In this, the two sides would set up a sacred mound of stones and burn a sacrifice to God, and that mound would be a witness -- they would see it and it would "tell" them, "Hey, remember what you did?" And so seeing it, they would remember and keep their agreement, hopefully. **Third**, When Joshua got the people across the river, they took stones from the riverbed before the river began flowing through again, and they piled them up on the shore as a testimony, a memorial of remembrance to what God did for them that day. And their children would come and ask, "What are those stones for, Daddy?" and Daddy would tell them the story of how God delivered them through the sea.

Near the end of Joshua's life, they observed a renewal of the covenant agreement between God and themselves; Joshua set up a big stone and said "It has heard all the words the LORD has said to you [and by implication -- the promises you made to the Lord]. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God." So, this permanent thing is a constant reminder of what you promised and what God has promised..



In our modern world, some may think it is silly to animate such lifeless things. On the other hand, I can't count how many times I have been told by a person that they will not come to church because if they did, the roof would fall in.... -- And I don't take that literally, but I understand what they are trying to say. The excuse they are trying to give is that they are so out of sync with the atmosphere of that

place that they just wouldn't fit and they wouldn't feel comfortable there. The walls would bear witness against them if they came anywhere near. This, in essence, is what they are saying.

The point Jesus is making when he says the stones will cry out is that if the people do not declare the intent of this event before God, then the stones themselves will remind us of what we have failed to say and do and live, of our impure motives this day, for in line with OT Jewish faith metaphor, they too hear what we say and what we do... And besides, the whole setting is so electrified with the energy of what is happening that (to use bad grammar) it couldn't be stopped no way no how. This kind of faith excitement is contagious. This kind of faith excitement is dangerous. Depending upon where you sit with your faith.

And as the celebration continued, they threw up their hands in panic and disgust; "We've lost control of the whole thing now -- the whole world is chasing after him." And so just like Caiaphas, they said more than they knew. What disturbed them as a serious threat was actually what would save the world, if and when the world chooses to chase after and follow Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

And this is the third response of Palm Sunday. In John, Jesus doesn't get on the donkey until the crowd hails him as **GOD AMONG US** the nationalistic king of Israel. The way John writes it, the person who is "in the know" is drawn to the prophet Zephaniah (3:14-20). The essence of that passage declares that God is in your midst as the king of Israel, but the king is not localized to the national life and glory of Israel alone, he is for people all over the earth. He is the Lord God who has come to delight in you, to quiet you with his love, to rejoice over you with singing, remove the sorrow of the appointed feasts, and rescue the lame and gather the outcast. It is only proper that the world has run after him. [Pause]

So there are three main camps responding to the Lazarus miracle and to Jesus on this day of lamb choosing for the Passover festival -- Those who want to use Jesus as a resource to their own selfish agenda, those who would silence Jesus because he was in the way of their own selfish agenda, and those like Mary of Bethany and perhaps a big handful of others who recognized Jesus as God among them, and lovingly worshipped him and (at least) intended to follow him to the ends of the earth.

Meditation – Procession of Stones

So now, with the labeling stone and palm in hand, bow your heads. With eyes closed, ponder these questions I'll read now but they are printed in the bulleting for extended meditation at a later date. We realize that Jesus is nearly at the end of his journey now; and as he is, so we too are near the end of our journey of stones. We could make the question easy for us today and simply ask in very general, abstract terms:

1) Am I a part of the cheering crowd or the jeering crowd? The crowd that cries out for God or the one that cries out to silence God and his people?

That is an easy one if we keep it in general and abstract terms. *But let's dig deeper and ask ourselves* these things:

2) In what areas of my life have I neglected or lost my actions, my attitudes, my voice, so that the stones have to cry out instead of me? Where have I been silent when I need to be speaking?

3) If these crying stones could speak a testimony about me in front of God and all; what specific areas, actions, attitudes, comments, would I pray that they lose their voice? What should I do about that, in those areas of my life?

4) As I make decisions in my life, do I look (cry out) to God to receive help to accomplish my *own* goals? Do I desire (cry out) to **not** hear God's voice so I can pursue my own goals my own way? Or do I seek to align my goals with God's desires and become instruments of his will for myself, for others, and for our world?

It might be easier to answer as if we contain within us only one of those three things, those attitudes and lifestyles. But let's be honest about our complicated, compartmentalized, diverse lives. Let's ask the question about each area of our lives, about each important decision we make. As I meditate now, and through the week, is God laying some topic of life on my heart in which I haven't spoken, or I want him to be quiet, or -- where I am not calling on him when I should? or am I seeking to silence his voice because it is "in the way?"

As always, if nothing comes to mind, use the stone for whatever is weighing you down today, be it yourself or concern for another; and if you have trouble moving around, feel free to hand the stone to another to carry it up to this cross when the time comes – for we are called to carry each other's burdens.

Music Think on these things as the instruments play through our meditation song once, when the song begins again, we will stand as quietly as possible, and begin singing the first verse while we bring our crying stone to leave at the foot of the

cross in front of me – today we bring it as a symbol that our hearts are crying out to cheer and call on Jesus to guide us in every area of our life -- or whatever else is pressing on you -- then return to our seats, but remain standing and continue singing to the end of the song...



My Faith Looks Up to Thee

Words: Ray Palmer, 1875 Music: Lowell Mason, 1831

1. My faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine!
Now hear me while I pray, take all my guilt away,
O let me from this day be wholly thine!
2. May thy rich grace impart strength to my fainting heart,
my zeal inspire! As thou hast died for me,
O may my love to thee pure, warm, and changeless be, a living fire!
3. While life's dark maze I tread, and griefs around me spread,
be thou my guide; bid darkness turn to day,
wipe sorrow's tears away, nor let me ever stray from thee aside.

^ **Blessing** And now as the last echo of Alleluia fades, and the hopes of victory over Rome fades and we realize this week's journey cannot end any differently that it did, that the rest of the week will be glory-less and pain-full, and the faith that looks up now has to look at a horrific execution, nevertheless go and stick by his side and travel this week's road with courage, with love, and with the uneasy peace that is the gift of faith – into this holiest of weeks. Amen.