

We Heard the Stones Cry Out  
Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020  
The Rev. Barbara E. Davis

My playground as a kid was sixteen acres of woods and grass around our farmhouse in western Pennsylvania. About a quarter mile back in the woods was an old stone quarry. The way the stones had been cut out of that piece of land in blocks, the edge rocks that were left were squared in way that made it clear it wasn't nature's work. There was an area of just earth in the middle of that quarry, "the island" I called it and it was surrounded by what was a wide moat where the stones had been taken. A little creek ran over one of the squared stones, forming a five-foot water fall. This place was a sanctuary for me, a quiet place. One of our neighbors, Mrs. Mushrush, who was in her 90's when we moved there, remembered when they used to quarry the stones.

I was too young to ask her many questions about it, but in retrospect I would have loved hearing the stories of how they removed those stones and what that part of the woods was like with the bustle of work. Those workers changed that landscape for generations to come, their presence marked the rock faces, but their stories were long lost, even in the local yore.

I've found myself thinking a great deal about those stones over my ministry at First Church. I've thought about that quarry a lot in the last five years, especially as Ralph Morgan, Tony Feliciano and I sat and listened to architects tell stories about finding brownstone, in an effort to convince us they knew how to match the stones in our building for the recent tower project. But this week, those old quarry stones have been on my mind for another reason. I've been thinking about the stories they knew, the ones they kept to themselves, and the ones they wanted to cry out and tell, if only they could.

All the gospel communities tell the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem, and each of them have their own little flair in telling the story. With the exception of John's community, the gospels begin this story with a feeling of premonition, and a kind of unsettling emotional state that Jesus knows more about how the events will unfold than what is humanly possible. He sends the disciples to get a donkey, telling them exactly where it is and what to say if they are asked any questions. In these verses that Hannah Faye read to us, we get a sense of the spontaneous joy of the followers of Jesus and the heightened tension that is created with the religious leadership around Jesus. Something more is happening here than what meets the eye, or reaches the ear. This story is not the same ordinary conflict that we have heard previously in the gospel, this story is extraordinary, we can feel it in how it is told to us. The past in Galilee is suddenly a faraway time. Something in the story is in motion that can no longer be changed, no matter who shouts or how much, the world is changed in the blink of an eye.

Only Luke's community gives the stones a voice, amplifying the sea change of this day. If we yell at the top of our lungs or if we fall silent, the cries of the world are proclaimed on this day. "Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!" Jesus answered, "I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout."

Imagine this scene for a minute. We are there among the followers, spreading our clothes on the road, coronavirus fears aside. Our bodies brush each other as we jostle palms. Our children poke each other with the branches as they always do, all our voices shouting out. It is chaotic, like the first five minutes of the zoom call before everyone gets settled in; we're talking over each other, trying to find the video camera button or the microphone button to unmute

ourselves and enter into the fray. In this version, Jesus calls us to order and quiets us. And in that silence, we hear more voices, the stones are crying out. What are they saying?

Maybe what we hear, on this Palm Sunday, is the stones repeating the human phrases, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” Or maybe what we would hear from the stones is a different story. The stones might tell us story more like an expression of the time we are in right now.

Because back then when Jesus entered Jerusalem was a lot like the seismic change we are in right now. The silence might let the stones tell a story expressing how the very ground we walk on is changing. The stones might tell a story about how the world is never going to be the same. The stones remember four weeks ago, like it was yesterday, the normal that is no more. A normal will come back, but will be drastically different than what we knew before. It is okay to weep for this loss. The very stones of our city are grieving with us; for people lost, for businesses lost, jobs lost, routines lost, celebrations lost. The stones remember the days that blur together for us, the way the we were making decisions and then the timetables changed, the needs changed, the decisions needed to be made all over again. The stones tell that story, but they tell it not as a story of just fear, or just sadness and loss, but as a story of hope. A story of possibility.

Like that day so many years ago in Jerusalem, we are quite suddenly in a time that is unprecedented, in a city that has witnessed many unprecedented events. But the story the stones tell isn’t all grief, the story the stones tell is about what we have in the present, and what will come. We don’t have to have all the answers today, in fact, we may not have many answers for a very long time. We can be silent and listen to the stones, as they tell the story of people who are resilient. We can listen to the stones tell a story of how this change comes with grief and hope. It is a story about what can come, what will come in our future together. The stones know what we are learning about ourselves in pause. The stones know what we are learning about connection, about community, about the small blessings of food and soap. The stones know stories of kindness, of creativity. Listen...do you hear their voices?

Today, we are so much more like those disciples that day so many years ago in Jerusalem. If we are silent, the world will not keep still. The stones will cry out our story and tell of this time, the stories of laughter, the stories of weeping, the stories of hope in the midst of change. The stones will tell our stories today and for years to come.