

“Crying Stones”

Exodus 3:7-8a & Luke 19:29-40

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Prayer for Understanding Speaking God, most days we are inundated with noise. Some of it is good—laughter, music, storytelling. Some of it is hard—arguments, slurs, the sound of bomber planes. Every day we live between silence and shouting, rotating through quiet and noise. So in the midst help us to hear what is yours. Help us to hear your song, your story, your good news. Help us to hear your voice, your Spirit, your will. And show us how to release the rest. Please help us listen. Amen.

God hears every voice. God is creating space for everyone to find their voice. God is making space for every good and loving voice to be understood. In the Kingdom of God every good and loving voice is loved, heard, and understood, even the voices of stones. The Palm Sunday parade gives us a glimpse of the coming glory of every good and loving voice being acknowledged, valued, celebrated, and loved.

Jesus made space by healing people, welcoming everyone into community, amplifying the voice of people being silenced, speaking in the temple, teaching in the wilderness, loving extravagantly, and calling everyone to follow God’s most excellent way of love. Jesus never excluded anyone.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus chose to enter humbly on a colt, so he would be on the same level as the crowd. The walking of a single colt was almost silent, so the voices of the crowd could be heard. Matthew and Mark indicate that the crowd was shouting “hosannas.” “Hosannas” are prayers of people crying out “save me”. “Hosannas” are cries for deliverance, freedom, and salvation. “Hosannas” are cries for my voice to be understood. During the entire parade, scripture indicates that Jesus listened and only spoke one sentence in response to some religious leaders who wanted to silence these prayers. Scripture states: **Luke 19:39-40 “But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, “Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!” Jesus replied, “If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would cry out!”**

The way to silence someone at that time was to stone them to death. The stones used as an instrument of death will cry out giving voice to the silenced. The Romans and religious leaders thought they had silenced Jesus, and all the voices he advocated for, by killing Jesus and sealing him in a tomb with a stone. And the stone cried out their voices. And the stone rolled away crying out all good and loving voices will be resurrected and understood by everyone.

On Palm Sunday, there were two parades: the parade of Jesus making space for “hosannas” and crying stones; and the parade of Roman imperial power led by trumpeters drowning out voices, Pilate elevated above the people symbolizing that his voice was superior, surrounded by soldiers who were there to silence any dissenting voices.

Palm Sunday happened as people were streaming into Jerusalem for the Passover, the celebration of God hearing the voices of the oppressed and delivering them from slavery to freedom. Exodus states: **Exodus 3:7-8a “God told Moses, “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. I will come down to rescue them...”**

The gospel of Luke declares: **Luke 19:29-40 NLT “As Jesus came to the towns of Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples ahead. “Go into that village over there,” Jesus told them. “As you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, ‘Why are you untying that colt?’ just say, ‘The Lord needs it.’” So they went and found the colt, just as Jesus had said. And sure enough, as**

they were untying it, the owners asked them, “Why are you untying that colt?” And the disciples simply replied, “The Lord needs it.” So they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their garments over it for Jesus to ride on. As Jesus rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of Jesus. When Jesus reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of Jesus’ followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. “Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!” But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, “Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!” Jesus replied, “If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would cry out!”

The good news is for everyone, for people in Jesus’ parade and Pilate’s parade and everyone in between. The good news is for the peasant procession and the royal procession and everyone in between. The good news is for people whose voice is understood and people who are being silenced. God loves everyone.

You are lovingly created good, made in the image of God, and whenever you speak of your goodness and love, the love and goodness of the cosmos is expanded. You have uniqueness, that when understood, completes the cosmos.

People’s voices are being silenced today, so stones are crying out. Are you listening? Stones cry out whenever they are hatefully hurled to silence someone. Stones cry out when they are formed into walls to divide. Stones cry out in joy when they are formed into bridges to unite.

Palm Sunday urges you to listen to the good and loving voices in your mind. Yes, you are different from everyone else. God made you distinct to expand the glory of the cosmos. There are religious leaders, government officials, and fearful, hateful people that are trying to silence you. Be true to yourself. Find your voice. God hears your voice. God hears your prayers for deliverance. Your voice will be understood. You will be free to shine with your unique goodness and love.

Palm Sunday urges us to join crying stones in helping every good and loving voice be understood. Who is being excluded, judged, oppressed, and silenced? God wants to partner with you in creating space for them to be understood. Telling someone’s story helps their voice be understood.

As a teenager, I heard the voice of a kind, loving deacon in the church. I saw how she was abused by her husband. The abuse escalated, so she left him and divorced him. He spread lies about her. In the community, her voice was silenced. I was shocked that the church silenced her voice. Some even said there is no place for a divorced woman to be a deacon of this church. I sensed that most did not think that way, but they were silent and let the hateful vocal voice echo. The church removed her from the deacon board and scrubbed her name from the newsletter. Abandoned by the church, she stopped giving money and attending. So, the church sent a couple of ruling elders to ask her for her financial pledge. I saw how hurt she was. She lamented that the church is more concerned about my money than they are about me. Over the years, no one named how her voice was silenced. They have repeatedly asked her to come back to serve, to be active again, to give. The church is now small. They recently reached out to her explaining how the church needs her. She cannot get past how in her moment of crisis when she needed the church, the church abandoned her and silenced her voice. She and her voice will be understood.

I strive to be gracious and spacious to see the good in every interpretation of scripture. However, when someone uses scripture to silence someone, to spread fear and hate, I believe God has called me to find my voice and speak up. I confess, I misinterpret scripture. I am grateful for people who have pointed out to me how I sometimes silence the spacious, gracious voice of God.

I have heard several sermons on the “Woman at the Well”. A few of them begin from a seemingly good place preaching that Jesus is gracious to the woman but they demean the women, judge

her, and silence her by their insinuations that there is something wrong with her for having been divorced five times. I encourage you to read the account in the fourth chapter of John. Putting the pieces of the account together we discover this woman is well-educated, intelligent, and courageous in speaking her good and loving insights. Scripture explains how she has knowledge about Jewish and Samaritan worship. She had the courage to speak to Jesus, to ask questions, and the wise spiritual insightfulness to perceive the deep spiritual truths Jesus was speaking. Those five husbands likely divorced her because they could not silence her. Jesus affirmed her voice. The account ends with this woman's voice being understood. And when others heard her voice, they came to Jesus, to hear this God who gave this woman her voice back.

Recently I listened to *The Woman they Could Not Silence: One woman, her incredible fight for freedom and the men who tried to make her disappear*, a true story of the historical battle for women's and mental health rights. I highly recommend this book. Elizabeth Packard was educated and had a brilliant mind. She eloquently spoke and wrote in a manner that shined light on everyone. Elizabeth was on earth from 1816 to 1897. Elizabeth's husband was a Presbyterian pastor and was navigating the old school, new school, controversy that began in 1837 and lasted 20 years splitting the Presbyterian denomination. Occasionally at Bible study Elizabeth would share insights on scripture. Her husband became jealous of her brilliance and gifted speaking. In those days legally a husband could silence the voice of his wife by declaring her insane and committing her to a mental asylum which he did. People who spoke up for Elizabeth had their voices silenced by legal threats. In those days, a woman had no voice, no right to speak to her sanity, no right to a trial, no right to an impartial doctor to diagnose her mental health. Elizabeth was forcefully carried away and locked in an asylum where she was drugged and abused. The asylum was full of sane women whose husbands were silencing. The women were often denied a toilet, meals, heat, a blanket and water to bathe. When a woman spoke up, they were dragged to a tub and held under water until they would comply. If they drowned, their body was discarded into an unmarked mass grave. Elizabeth kept writing and found allies who smuggled out her writings. After a long, horrible season she got out of the asylum. Her voice got through to some people and eventually there was a trial, unprecedented the judge allowed Elizabeth to speak, the jury found Elizabeth sane. Elizabeth kept speaking and her voice helped people repent and change laws that acknowledged the voices of women. Elizabeth felt kinship with the slaves who were being liberated at the same time. Elizabeth spoke up for other minorities striving to create space for their voices to be understood. The account of Elizabeth having her voice silenced caused my emotions to rage, sadness, disappointment, discouragement, disturbed, frustration, anger, and more. The epilogue chilled me. Several quotes were noted. I thought they were from the 1800s. They were made by politicians today. The playbook is similar when someone outside the mainstream speaks up, call them crazy, spread lies, create fear, pass laws to silence their voice.

A theme of Lent is Jesus' one sentence sermon, "Repent and Believe the Good News". Repent, change, listen, help every good and loving voice be understood. Repent, be less like the pharisee silencing voices and more like Jesus making space for every voice. I surmise many people do not attend church because humanity limits grace, destroys space, and silences voices. Many people do not feel understood or loved by the church, instead they are misunderstood, ignored, and sometimes labeled, shamed, and condemned. I confess. I need to repent. I need to listen more. I need to share sermons that are more spacious, more gracious, and more affirming of every good and loving voice so everyone feels they belong, so everyone is safe, so everyone can express their voice.

If you're good and loving voice is being silenced, you will be understood.

The parable of the Good Samaritan urges us to repent from fearfully asking, "If I help this person, what will happen to me?" to lovingly asking, "If I do not help this person, what will happen to

them?”. Silence the fearful, hateful voices. You may not yet be in a space to listen to every voice, then at least strive to not be fearful or hateful; or speaking, working, voting, stoning to silence voices.

People like Elizabeth Packard and Rosa Parks, who propelled repentance movements, succeeded because there was a chorus of voices supporting them. People who help them find their voice. People who encouraged them to speak, to articulate their pain, injustice, oppression and the way to freedom. People who spoke up when they were arrested, imprisoned, committed, belittled, called crazy, so their voice could be understood.

Jesus graciously created space for every good and loving voice to be understood. Jesus was crucified for advocating that every voice be understood. That was the primary way the Romans silenced voices. The rich, powerful, dictators crucified people and left their dead bodies hanging so anyone who was getting the courage to speak would know the consequences. The fearful religious leaders, and the Roman empire, thought they silenced Jesus, and silenced all the voices that Jesus gave space to speak, by sealing Jesus, and those silenced, in a tomb with a stone. The stone cried out. The stone rolled away. The stone opened up space for every silenced good and loving voice to be resurrected and understood.

A religious leader told Jesus to silence the people. Scripture proclaims: **Luke 19:40 “Jesus replied. ‘If they kept quiet, the stones along the road would cry out!’”** You and your good and loving voice will be understood. Amen