

WPC
Rev. Ken Sunoo
March 28, 2010 – Palm Sunday

Shouting Stones
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Luke 19:28-40

The fall of 1988 was a particularly dark time in my life. I had just moved from my beloved California out to New Jersey to attend seminary. There's nothing particularly wrong with New Jersey, but for someone who had spent a lifetime on the West Coast, I was severely homesick (Fortunately, I eventually got over my homesickness, met my wife Deb, and things have looked up ever since.) But those first few months were miserable, and the approach of my first East Coast winter was, to say the least, a shock to the system.

Wind chill?!? What the heck is wind chill, and why was it relentlessly pursuing me? I'd never experienced anything so shocking as that icy winter cold - it hurt just to walk outside. The ski jacket that I had bought in San Francisco was worthless in that kind of environment. I hardly ever left my dorm room that fall – I felt like shriveling up and dying because I was so miserable. It reminds me of a scene in the movie “Cool Runnings,” when the Jamaican bobsled team arrives in Calgary for the Olympics. [PLAY MOVIE CLIP]

To add insult to injury, that year one of my favorite baseball teams made it to the World Series and lost against my least favorite team: my hometown Oakland A's vs. the hated Los Angeles Dodgers. In my family, you rooted for the A's, the San Francisco Giants, and anybody who was playing against the Dodgers. So you can imagine the cognitive dissonance I felt when I discovered my sister-in-law and her whole family were lifelong Dodger fans – how could such nice people support that team?

In any case, some of you may remember that the A's were heavily favored to win, but the Dodgers took control in game 1 when Kirk Gibson hit his walk-off home run in the bottom of the 9th inning. After that, the Dodgers never looked back. I still have nightmares from that series.

But I've also grudgingly come to respect one of the Dodger players over the years. Orel Herschiser was an unbelievable pitcher who pitched an amazing 1988 season for the Dodgers. Following a complete game shutout in August, he did not allow his opponents to score an earned run in 59 consecutive innings. He was the Most Valuable Player in the playoffs and World Series, as well as winning the Cy Young award for best pitcher in the league.

In one of the final games of the playoffs, the TV cameras zoomed in and caught Orel in the dugout between innings softly singing to himself.

Unable to make out the tune, the announcers merely commented that Orel's record certainly gave him something to sing about. A few days later when Orel appeared on the "Tonight Show," Johnny Carson asked him what song he had been singing during the game and if Orel would sing it right then and there.

The audience egged him on and roared their approval over Orel's embarrassed reluctance. Finally, on national TV, Orel Herschiser softly sang the tune that he had been singing while competing in the World Series:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise him all creatures here below;

Praise him above, ye heavenly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

We were created to praise, to worship, to glorify God.

"Anthropologists have noted that worship is a universal urge, seemingly hard-wired into the very fiber of our being. Praise is not created to be a part of our life; it *is* our life."¹ And praise is not limited to human beings.

¹ Lindsay P. Armstrong, Preaching the Lenten Texts, *Journal for Preachers*, p. 13.

As Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday riding on a donkey, the multitudes began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice. The other gospels tell us that they also waved palm branches, and Luke says they shouted, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Jesus’ critics are unnerved by this demonstration because they know that Rome will come down hard on Israel for claiming there is another king other than Caesar. So they tell Jesus, “Tell your people to shut up.” They want Jesus to tone down the outburst from the people. During Jesus’ earthly life, it’s estimated by scholars that there were at least 60 armed rebellions against the Romans. People waving palm branches and shouting was a threatening sign, particularly when they were shouting that there was a new king in town.

In response to this demand that he tell his followers to be quiet, Jesus says something interesting: “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

One commentator says, “There is something about Jesus that can make even a rock want to shout. Jesus had gotten this sort of thinking from the Hebrew Scriptures where trees clap their hands for joy, the hills skip into

a dance, the waves cry out, and the mountains shout. The bible teaches that matter can sing.”²

If all of creation sings praises to God, then it’s silly to expect Jesus’ disciples to stay silent. One of the things I love about our church is that we welcome the loud voices of our children. Their vibrancy and the joyful noise they make remind us of the good news that God’s love and deliverance have arrived in the form of Jesus riding a donkey.

And it’s not just children who shout out in joy when confronted with the good news of Jesus.

William Willimon tells a story of a time when he was participating in a three-hour worship service in a large African American church in one of the poorest parts of the city. He asked the pastor, half in jest, “Why do black people make so much noise when they worship?” They had been subjected to throbbing, at times thundering, music throughout the service. His friend had preached a long sermon in which he whooped, shouted, strutted, and even screamed.

His friend shook his head in sadness and replied, “It really makes you white people nervous when we get happy, doesn’t it? Why is our worship so loud? We’ve got people here who have spent their whole lives keeping

² William Willimon, Pulpit Resource, 3/28/10, p. 54.

quiet. They are expected silently to wait on tables, to make up rich people's bedrooms and clean their houses for low pay without complaint. They are never asked what they think about anything. They're never invited to come to the microphone and render a verdict on what's going on in the world. They are voiceless. Silent.

“So we get them down here in the church, and we give them a microphone. We tell them that here, this is free space, God-created space, and if they want to strut, and they want to shout, they can because Jesus has made them royalty.”

Willimon says this seems to be a fairly typical response to Jesus – shouting. When Jesus sets foot in town, people – especially the voiceless – speak up. And as Jesus says, all creation can shout his glory.³

As we begin our journey through Holy Week, let us all speak up and join all creation in shouting Jesus' glory. Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise him all creatures here below; Praise him above, ye heavenly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen.

³ Willimon, p. 55-56.