

Praise and Rocks
1st Sunday in Advent
November 29, 2009

I invite you to open your Bibles to Luke 19:28-40. Luke is the 3rd book in the New Testament, so the order goes, Matthew, Mark, **Luke**, and John. Luke was a doctor by trade, and wrote his Gospel through interviews with people who knew Jesus and followed him. After the conversion of the murderous Saul to the Apostle known as Paul, Luke spent the bulk of the rest of his life with Paul until Luke was put to death for being a Christian.

Does it seem odd to anyone that the reading for today is from the Triumphal entry? What we read in the Gospel reading today is the account of Palm Sunday! Shouldn't we be waiting until, oh, I don't know... *Palm Sunday* to read this?

I suppose one could argue that, this being the first Sunday in Advent and all. But remember – Advent was never intended to be about preparing for Christmas. That idea came later. Advent was originally “invented” (if you will) to prepare ourselves for the Second Coming of Christ – the day when He comes back as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and exacts judgment and punishment on the devil, his demons and the people who rejected Him as their Savior. We can't celebrate and prepare for the Second Coming unless Jesus is who the Bible claims He is – the one who suffered, died, rose and ascended into Heaven. He can't come back *from* Heaven if He didn't *go to* Heaven after rising from the dead.

So, today the reading is about the triumphal entry and the shouts of the people. Starting next week the good folks from Vatican II who divvied up the readings into three year segments, have more “Christmas-y” selections until Christmas. Today, what I'd like to do is focus on a few things in this reading, and explain the rocks you were handed this morning.

In my office I have a few things on my bookshelf, and many of you who have been in my office have asked me about them. I have four clay jars that were gifts from very dear and close friends of ours, the meaning of which relate to the passage in 2 Corinthians 4:7, “We have this treasure in jars of clay...”; I have a jar filled with rice and golf balls that reminds me of Matthew 6:33, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well.”

I also have this rock. I know it's not much to look at – it's gray, a little speckled here and there, and a little oddly shaped. Anyone would walk right by this rock and never give it a second thought. There's nothing special about it, except for one thing: Jesus spoke a prophetic word about it.

Let's get the context first. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey fulfilling the words of the Old Testament prophet Zechariah. In fact, you can write in the margins of your Bibles “Zechariah

9:9": *Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

In our reading this morning, what the people cried out to Jesus was "Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord." To come in the name of someone meant to come in the power and authority of that person. They were equating Jesus with the Lord, and in Mark we read the people were also crying out to Him, "Hosanna!", which means, "Save us, *right now!*"

Save us right now, Lord God. You are worthy of our praise and our blessing, now and forever, because You *are* the Lord. You, and only You, can save us.

And it drove the Pharisee's mad. The people were attributing salvation to Jesus alone, and were praising Him and calling on Him to save them. They were calling Jesus God, and He didn't stop them.

Did they understand the way to salvation would be through the cross? No.

Did they understand their salvation would be won by Jesus being killed? No. In fact in John we find out they wanted to force Jesus to become their king.

Did they know another crowd would gather in a few days and yell out just as exuberantly as they, "Crucify Him!" No, they had no clue that the tide would turn in just a matter of days.

There's one other thing going on here, too: even though the prophet was clear about the coming of the Messiah on a donkey, there was a prevailing thought during this time. The thought went like this: if Israel is ready for the Messiah, He will come riding on a white horse. If Israel is not ready, He will come riding on a donkey.

In the action of riding a donkey Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of the coming Messiah, and also showed that Israel wasn't ready.

Are we? Are you? Am I?

Last week we read Jesus' words saying, "No one knows the hour or the day." Will we be ready when He comes back? Because make no doubt about it – He's coming back! He promised us He would, and one thing about Jesus – He always keeps His promises!

So, let's get back to this rock, and the rocks you were handed this morning.

The people in our reading this morning were not ready for the Messiah as He was really to come, but they were excited to have Him in their midst. They might not have understood the full ramifications of Jesus' coming, but they knew their only hope was in Him, and they were not ashamed or afraid to make it known.

And Jesus made it clear: if they didn't cry out in prayer and praise, the rocks would.

When was the last time we didn't care what people around us thought and we raised our arms and closed our eyes and gave our praise to our God?

When was the last time we were moved to tears in our prayer time as we lifted our thanksgivings and joys and praise to Jesus?

Never let a rock out-praise you.

Jesus said if the people back then didn't do it, the rocks would. If He came into our lives today, would He say the same thing, or would our praise be drowned out by a rock?

Never let a rock out-praise you.

If a group of visitors were to come to our homes, to our Christmas celebrations many will start having in a few weeks, would they find the praise of Jesus proclaimed, or would the rocks outside make more of a joyful noise than the redeemed children of God?

Never let a rock out-praise you.

And that's the point of these Scripture Stones we handed out this morning. Each stone has a Bible verse on it. Keep this stone in a visible place: on top of the TV, on the bed stand next to your pillow, tie a string around it and hang it from the rearview mirror in your car. Whatever you do with it, keep it visible, and let it be a reminder of the prophetic word Jesus said: if we don't praise Him, the rocks will.

Don't let this rock out-praise you.

But what about the hard times? What about all the 'bad' stuff going on? How do you offer praise when your life's not where you want it to be?

We've been 'good.' We go to church, we give our offerings, we volunteer our time. Ok, we're not perfect, but at least we're not as bad as that person over there. At least we didn't do the thing this person did, or think the thoughts, or do the deed this other person committed. Why can't we catch a break? Why do we have problems in this life? Why don't You just make it all better, Jesus?

And sometimes Jesus simply says, "no." Sometimes the things that would seek to steal our joy and praise are not taken away.

Would we praise Him if they were? Maybe, but Jesus didn't come to make our lives easy.

Why did Jesus come? To save His people – that's all who call on Jesus as their only Lord and Savior – from their sins. You can also write Romans 6:23 in the margins of your Bibles – "*The*

wages {or cost} of sin is death {that is, eternal death in hell}. But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is why He came – to save us from our sins, the cost of which is hell: eternal damnation, eternal separation from God the Father.

Whoever said the healing of a broken limb or the granting of a job, or the comfort of the Holy Spirit in times of mourning was anymore miraculous than the healing of a broken heart? Whoever said that is wrong. Not ‘bad’, just wrong. Jesus didn’t come to heal our broken bodies, but to heal our broken hearts. He came out of an empty tomb to fill our empty hearts, and that’s something to give thanks for.

Does that make it easier when we are struggling with various things and just don’t *feel* like giving praise? Let’s be honest: not always. So what do we do? We give thanks that Jesus is more than just a quick-fix God; a genie in the lamp that we can call on to make our present lives more comfortable.

So how do we give praise in the hard times?

First, we give praise that though our physical bodies may not be healed, our souls have been. Because of that, we will one day be in Heaven with a perfect body.

Second, we give praise by continuing to pray. We pray saying “I praise You Jesus for who You are, and I trust You and Your will for my life. Like You, I pray, “Thy will be done.”

Thy will be done, even if it’s not what I want. Thy will be done, even if it means I don’t feel like praising you in the midst of this storm I’m in. Thy will be done, no matter what the cost is to me.

Third, we don’t give up the faith. We live in a world where things that don’t satisfy us immediately are thrown away in exchange for something else. I have one last scripture reference I invite you to write in the margins of your Bibles next to these verses in Luke. It is Romans 5:3-5: *... we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.*

What’s the hope we have? The hope of seeing nail scarred hands reaching out to us on the last day and hearing, “Welcome Home. I’ve been waiting a long time for this day. I know you will like the place I’ve prepared for you.”

The hope of finally being freed from all our sufferings and the pains of this life. That’s something to give praise for.

The knowledge that God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom He has given us. The most important healing has already taken place – the hearts of those who call on

Jesus as their Savior have been healed. Healed hearts in broken bodies. Sinful hearts in sinful bodies, to be sure; but healed none-the-less.

The healing of the heart, the strengthening of faith, and the mighty love of our Triune God that will not let us go.

That's something to praise God for, despite anything else that may be going on.

Never, ever let a rock out-praise you!

Will you pray with me please?

Lord Jesus, You are the only one worthy of our praise! You created us, You saved us at great cost to Yourself, You sent Your Spirit to us, You're preparing a place for us, and You're coming back to take us to be with You! To You, Father, Son and Spirit – our Triune God – be blessing and praise and honor and power forever and ever!

Jesus, when we are honest with ourselves, sometimes we don't *feel* like praising You. Life is sometimes hard, Jesus, and sometimes we don't understand why You don't do what we want You to do to make our lives easier. It can be hard to praise You in the storm, Jesus.

Help us to remember that even in the storms of life, You are the one who *controls* the storm. It is only by and through Your hand, that anything happens in our lives. Help us to remember that and give You praise in those times.

You spoke a prophetic word about stones, Jesus. Be with all Your children that we never have hearts that are stone-hard, but open and obedient to You. Jesus, pour out Your Spirit on us that we are never out-praised by a rock!

Amen