

Shouting and Silence
By Rev. Ridgley Beckett Joyner
Lenten Series “Everything in Between” (4/13/2025)
Luke 19:29-44

Hi. I’ve missed you. Each and every one of you. And what a joy it is to return to the pulpit on such a joyous Sunday. I have to say—Lent is interesting when you find yourself joining in on the festivities with your church family at the end. As I was putting together “Holy Week Packs” for our families, I came across an article about how to talk to your kids about Easter and the first sentence was—we LOVE to talk about Christmas-babies! Stars! Joy! Easter? A bit more of a challenge. Admittedly, Lent is one of the most challenging seasons for me. Not because I can’t get on the board with the whole “we are broken” schtick. No, proclaiming God’s love for us even though it’s messy is great good news for me. As a self-proclaimed “pastor who loves the darkness of scripture” Lent is still hard for me. Perhaps for many, Palm Sunday and Easter are the days we most look forward to in Lent, and not just because of the beautiful lilies.

BUT what I will say is that of all the Lenten series we’ve done, I am sorry to have missed journeying through this particular Lent with you during our “Everything in Between” series. I take a special liking to A Sanctified Art because they were my classmates, and they are my friends. When creative partner Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman shared her reflection, I felt like she put my thoughts of this past six months into words.

“In a world that feels polarized in just about every possible way, I find it difficult to discern my voice, and even more so at times, to align with God’s voice in the midst of it all. Countless media outlets vie for allegiance, using shock and outrage to try and force people to pick a side or develop a stark all-or-nothing worldview. It’s exhausting. The more I try to engage with this binary thinking, the more it all just kind of folds in on itself and falls apart. I long for a faith with nuance that honors the multiplicity and complexity that I experience in my life. I believe that God is in fact not contained by our categories, or influenced by our dividers and walls. What would it look like to loosen our grip on our preconceived ideas, and approach our search for God with a 'beginner's mind'? What would it look like to learn from one another and to grow through mutual understanding without compromising what matters most?”¹

If you’re like me and you haven’t made it to worship as much as you would have liked at St. John’s this Lent, we’re working through a series that journeys with Jesus as he sets his face toward Jerusalem in the book of Luke. We have studied the stories and parables that defined Jesus’ final chapter in ministry. Many of these stories—the good Samaritan, Mary & Martha, the parable of the fig tree, and Zaccheus meets Jesus—are some of the Bible’s best hits—the kind of stories we touch on in Vacation Bible School—the ones that stick. They are familiar stories and carry a bit of cultural relevance today. For example, have you ever identified yourself as either a “Mary” or a “Martha?” The “Good Samaritan” title alone could

¹ Sanctified Art Sermon Guide for Lenten Series “Everything In Between”

reference a hospital, a charitable organization, a type of law, or a good deed. Perhaps you grew up singing “Zacchaeus was a wee little man” in Sunday School.

Yet as cozy as we have made these stories in our Christian culture, we easily forget that Jesus’ ministry was “rooted in relationships that disrupted the established social, political and religious divides of his time. As modern readers, we sometimes lose the “shock factor” behind Jesus’ words, as his teaching tactics likely felt extreme for those in his context. He described a stigmatized Samaritan as a good neighbor. He emphasized the value of 1 sheep in a herd of 100. He dined with a tax collector who amassed wealth through extortion. While dying on the cross, he told a convicted criminal he would soon find paradise. Jesus intentionally highlighted the cultural and political polarities of his time to emphasize the radical, inclusive, and surprising love of God. This is important for us to remember as we read our Palm Sunday scripture.

So for the past 5 weeks we’ve engaged the binaries of Stranger and Neighbor, Faith and Works, Rest and Growth, Lost and Found, Righteousness and Mercy discovering God’s invitation to dwell in the “in between” trusting that God shows up in shades of gray and rainbow hues. And today, we find ourselves in yet another familiar story we read year after year—Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

As ?? read, before he arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus stops at the Mount of Olives and instructs the disciples to go into the village and get a tied donkey there—*that has never been ridden*. Has anyone ever noticed that before? Jesus’ disciples follow his directives—they take off their cloaks and put it on the donkey and he mounts the donkey, riding it into Jerusalem. AND THE UNBROKEN DONKEY IS WILDLY OBEDIENT. A miracle in and of itself. As Jesus rides the colt down the mount of Olives, “the whole multitude of the disciples *begin* to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen” (Luke 19:37). The praises of the crowd are the words of Psalm 118, Blessed be the one who comes in the name of the Lord. But Luke has amended it to be ‘Blessed be the king who comes in the name of the Lord’

As Jesus makes his way into Jerusalem, this ‘triumphal entry’ is far from a political leader and king who rests on the strength of defeating his enemies. “Triumphal parades are meant to celebrate past triumphs and imply promised conquests. The cheering parade goers expect their hopes for peace to be fulfilled through the *use* of power, not the relinquishment of it.

As the crowd is shouting their praises like our kids today- HOSANNA! HOSANNA! The confrontation with power begins. The Pharisees approach Jesus and say, ‘Teacher, *order* your disciples to stop’ The Pharisees want these shouts to turn to silence. Now, we don’t

why this happens—perhaps the Pharisees dislike the implications of these shouts about Jesus as king, or maybe they are trying to keep some sort of peace, tame the chaos and bring about order, or perhaps they resist the popularity that Jesus has among the crowds. Why do the Pharisees want Jesus to silence the disciples?

Rev. Greg Carey suggests that Luke’s Pharisees were trying to keep Jesus in check rather than oppose him—they wanted Jesus to keep his teaching and activities “safe”—to downplay the radical challenge his ministry posed to social order and especially the rich and powerful. In Luke 15, Jesus laments over Jerusalem and calls it “the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. It could very well be that the Pharisees are worried that Jesus’ presence poses a threat to order and they wanted him to leave.”²

Jesus of course ignores this request by saying, and this is my favorite line in the passage this morning, “if these people were silent, even the stones would shout out.”

It will come as no surprise to you that while I was on sabbatical I went...wait for it... camping. I had never camped before in March, but I was determined to get some disconnected time outdoors at least once during my winter Sabbatical, and the weather cooperated. I was lucky enough to snag a campsite through the website HipCamp—an Airbnb type set up but for land. I had 164 acres all to myself on a farm in Southwest Virginia in the depths of Appalachia- coal country. The land seemed almost untouched and beautiful. One of the things I love about that region is how the people truly seem to live with the land, not on it. When I arrived at my campsite the owner of the property had already built me a fire and alerted me to all the rocks in the ground, and to be sure not to trip in the dark. The textures of this rocky bald I camped on were magnificent. The woman who lived there gave me a fossil as I arrived and showed me where I could find seashells.

The Appalachian mountains are much older than the Mountain ranges out west and are believed to have been a part of the Scottish highland mountain range in the Paleozoic area. According to the US Geological Service the rocks that make up the core of the Appalachian Mountains were formed over a BILLION years ago. These rocks have held so so much history. And here I was lucky enough to gather some up to make a fire pit, sit on one and stare at the milky way until I fell asleep.

My first day I drove up this *very* scary windy road with no guard rails and lots of cliffs to a trailhead that led me to the Great Channels of Virginia. After a beautifully silent hike with Seamus up the mountain I found what I had put on my bucket list—400 million year old sandstone outcroppings in the middle of a 700 acre natural area preserve. The Slot

² <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/palm-sunday/commentary-on-luke-1929-44>

Canyons were created 10,000 years ago by permafrost and ice wedging. The whole area was full of crystal white sand. It was insane. It was magnificent. It was...silent.

My whole trip, I kept wondering about the stories these rocks could tell. What they witnessed, endured, heard. Which is why this statement Jesus made sticks out to me so much---even if we are silent—the stones would shout out. Even the earth is crying out for God’s justice and peace Jesus came to bring about in the world. And the world...crucified him. Because false peace and order was more important. Because appeasing power rather than speaking truth to it was safer.

The reality was that the people were looking for a king to bring about justice and peace according to the world’s standards-- to defeat their enemies with power and strength and violence. They were placing their safety and hope for a leader who would exert might. But Jesus didn’t come to strike down, humiliate and isolate. Jesus came to lift up and embrace and reconcile. It is so easy for us to become comfortable with silence, to devote ourselves to order and a false sense of peace rather than justice and the peace that Jesus actually came to bring—but the space that lies in between silence and shouting, are beloved children of God who long to be heard, advocated for, and seen.

Jesus ‘triumphal entry’ into Jerusalem empowers us to throw down our cloaks and all that the things we cover our true selves with to blend in, to wave our branches and stand up for who God is, and to lift up our voice and join the song “Blessed in the one who comes in the name of the Lord” even if it disrupts things.

Friends, next Sunday, Lent will be over, and Easter will be upon us. The work doesn’t end because the season does. In fact, we’re just getting started. This week, I pray that you will join me in asking yourself ‘who is shouting to be heard this Holy Week?’ We are called to listen and advocate for those who have been silenced, and when we do the Gospel comes alive in radically new ways. (*walk to communion table*)³

Who is longing to be heard? What stories do they long to tell? Will we look the other way?
Will we tune it all out because it is just too much?

If these people were silent, even the stones would shout out”

May these stones, upheld by a table that is inscribed with the holy words of Jesus—be a reminder for us. That the sacred work we do in this world, we do in remembrance of a man who humbled himself to death on a cross, all for the sake of love.

³ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/triumphal-entry-2/commentary-on-luke-1929-44-2>