

"Would Stones Shout Out?"
(Luke 19: 28-40)
Apr 10, 2022

Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51) He went through towns and villages, one after another, when he was on his way (Luke 13:22), and this journey has neared its end. Before he reached Jerusalem, Jesus entered Jericho, often called the "city of palm" for its abundance of palm trees. Jericho was a city significant to the Jews because it was the first city standing in Israel's way of taking possession of Canaan. Its high and formidable walls, however, couldn't stop them.

If Jesus was the Messiah, did he come with the might of the same God too? Would he crumble the walls set up by the Roman Empire that made the people of God suffer just as God did when Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land? "Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth." (Leviticus 24:20) Would Jesus bring them a time of revenge?

On the contrary, Jesus showed favor in this city to a short but wealthy chief tax collector, Zacchaeus. Do you remember him? He initiated a change from within the Jewish culture, a revolution of the Jewish mindset, a paradigm shift from revenge to love, forgiveness, and mercy.

Jericho is not too far away from Jerusalem. They are only 30 km apart. As Jesus got closer to Jerusalem, he had to pass through an area near the villages Bethphage and Bethany. It seems that Jesus had already arranged his ride to Jerusalem. He sent two of his disciples to get a colt from its owners with the password, "The Lord needs it." Everything went smoothly according to the plan. Jesus didn't want to slip into Jerusalem, but presented himself as a

very different and surprising king who claimed his authority. They brought the colt back to where Jesus was and helped him to get on it. Actually, we are unsure how many animals the two disciples brought back since the Gospel of Matthew mentioned they brought back a donkey with her colt, and Jesus sat on both of them (Matt 21:2, 7). However, the number of the animals was not as significant as what it symbolized. A donkey in Palestine was not a lowly beast but noble. "Shout and cheer, Daughter Zion! Raise your voice, Daughter Jerusalem! Your king is coming! a good king who makes all things right, a humble king riding a donkey, a mere colt of a donkey." (Zechariah 9:9) This was a memory from the past. Jesus picked the figure of a king of love and peace when he entered Jerusalem. He might have waved to the crowds, and smiled at them. The donkey on which he rode did not wave, but I can imagine it was smiling too. It was almost an impossible task for anyone to sit on a donkey that no one had ridden before. It obviously liked the humble yet powerful one who was sitting up there.

As Jesus rode along, the people welcoming their king prepared his path with their most valuable possession, their cloaks. In today's passage, it doesn't say they cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road as the Gospel of Matthew described. The focus was more on the stage for the show set by Jesus. It's not for showing off his authority, but for the anticipation of the ordinary people, who didn't need to be wealthy and powerful. So, Jesus didn't want to be a triumphant and victorious king that rode a horse for wars and required a grand and luxurious welcoming ceremony, but a companion to the crowd that shouted "Hosanna," which means "Save us!"

Do you think they all understood Jesus very well? No, they don't. No matter how carefully Jesus planned, how clearly he explained, most people still didn't understand him. Jesus knew that. They would keep getting him wrong, again and again. Of course, some would think they understood him better and started to say out loud, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" They had their own agenda. However, the response they got from the Pharisees, the ones who had power, was loud and clear. "Zip it." "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." What a rude and angry expression from some of them! And how did Jesus respond to this? "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Was Jesus joking? No. He was serious. He came this time to claim his kingship and authority. He felt sick and tired of the representatives of an institution that over-emphasized the importance of traditions, rules, and boundaries. It misled the people to overlook that God loved the whole creation and accepted its imperfection. The practices, regulations, and limitations served only to segregate one constituent from the other, to encourage one to indulge in one's own business. Suppose you have followed the history of the Indigenous Peoples in North America, you'll notice that the United Church of Canada was the first religious denomination to issue an apology to them 46 years ago. But, as it always says, "Acceptance (of the apology) cannot be given until there is action." The denomination is still working hard on taking relevant action. It has taken a long time for an institution to change its course. So what do you think about Pope Francis' recent apology? Do you still feel comfortable putting your trust in an institution?

Besides history in the past, what about the current events in Europe. For example, has the United Nations done anything substantial to save lives in Ukraine even though there is evidence of war crimes? "Keep silence" or "Follow the rules" were not the routes Jesus wanted his disciples to take. Instead, Jesus wants our emotional involvement, just like the crowd who welcomed Jesus back then. He was serious when he said, "I tell you, the stones would shout out if these were silent."

Do you remember Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah, and the other prophets? They were all persons of action. They were all willing to risk their lives for what they believed. Are we dared to join this mystical communion and share the same courage in faith?

Our denomination has two sacraments: baptism and communion. Infant baptism usually indicates parents' wishes, while confirmation and adult baptism indicate what the participants in the ceremony want with their lives and how serious they profess their faith. "This is the body of Christ, broken for you." "This is the blood of Christ, shed for you." So when we eat it and drink it, don't forget to feel beyond the elements.

Do we gather together for the Gospel? Yes, we do. However, the Good News isn't only words, but also friendship, caring, celebration, and grief. Even though the ministries are numerous, the persons involved are most important.

So we should see more clearly why Jesus mingled with all types of people. He found it the best way to express the love of God. Being God's servant was bridging the boundaries that separated them all.

It's storytime.

"What are you seeking?" The Master asked a scholar who came to him for guidance.

"Life." The scholar replied.

"You yourself are a master. You should know that the only way to live is to let the words die."

The scholar couldn't understand and asked for further explanation.

Then the Master explained, "You are lost and forlorn because you dwell in a world of words. Words are words. They are not the "life" that you are seeking. A menu can never satisfy your hunger. An advertisement for a beverage will not slake your thirst. "

The cheering parade-goers probably expected their hopes for peace through the use of power. However, King Jesus thought differently. He chose to confront the power but not to abuse it. He wanted his disciples to keep their passion and enthusiasm since they would become most valuable when God put them in the right direction for a mission impossible.

"If these were silent, the stones would shout out." Jesus is a person of faith, and he sees faith in everyone. Keep the ambition. It's okay to join in with palm branches and joyful acclamation. Let it burn from inside like fire, and don't let it die down. If you dare to shout with joy at this ironic procession, do you dare to follow when Jesus carries his cross? If we kept quiet, the stones would shout out. Should the stones shout out?