

1

Last spring I filled my truck several times with rocks at the county quarry to use as landscaping in my yard. When I arrived at the quarry, I noticed that the rocks were sorted and piled according to size, so I drove to the pile of those I could lift into my truck. The large stones make wonderful borders around trees and shrubs, making it easier for me to mow around them. As I looked at the huge pile of stones, I searched for colorful rocks, ones that would add variety to my landscaping. As I gazed upon the rocks, at times it felt as though a stone would call out to me: "Please take me home. I'm so colorful. I would look lovely in your yard." I felt like an artist receiving an invitation to select wondrous colors to paint with stones in my yard.

I know it was just my imagination hearing those stones speak to me, but I wonder what Jesus had in mind when he suggested that even the stones might cry out for him. Some religious leaders told Jesus to tell his disciples to be quiet, and in response, Jesus replied, "I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout."

Often we don't even notice the stones lying on the ground, let alone hear them shout. Even in this story from Luke's gospel, the stones are almost overlooked.

On this Sunday before Easter, the stones of this day are usually overshadowed by the palm branches the crowd spread on the ground. But did you notice that the palms are missing in Luke's story? They're in the other gospel stories, but if you look closely, they are nowhere to be found in Luke! Nothing. Nada. Not one palm.

Instead, the crowd members spread their coats on the ground to greet Jesus as he rode into town on a donkey, reminiscent of an event hundreds of years earlier when a crowd greeted the newly appointed King Jehu by throwing their coats on the ground. Palm branches were another way of greeting a king, but Luke doesn't even mention them.

Meanwhile, the rocks lie resting on the ground. Overlooked. But why rocks? The Bible refers to palms about 50 times, but do you know how many times rocks get mentioned? Around 150. How about stones? 380. Stones were used to create altars to worship and remember God. Jacob used a stone for a pillow. God gave the Ten Commandments on stone. Precious stones were given as an offering for the temple. The Psalms refer to God as a rock, a safe place of protection. Even the tomb of Jesus was sealed with a large rock. Stones

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and rocks carry a very important role in the Bible. So this year, since Luke doesn't even mention palms but says that the rocks will cry out if we remain silent, let's celebrate today as Rock Sunday or Shouting Stone Sunday.

Rocks are often seen as a sign of strength. They're hard. Solid. Some even hard to move. Maybe the stones remind us of Jesus' strength in the midst of this coming week, a time of trial and suffering that eventually leads to his death. I know that it's much easier to celebrate Palm Sunday with a joyous parade than to walk alongside Jesus as he suffers. I know we would rather not see Jesus captured this week. I know we would rather turn away our eyes from seeing him suffer and die on a cross.

Theologian Marcus Borg reminds us of the role of suffering that occurs this week when he wrote:

as the week of Passover begins, Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey and people cheer him, shouting "Hosanna — blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Less well-known is the historical fact that a Roman imperial procession was also entering Jerusalem for Passover from the other side of the city. It happened every year: the Roman governor of Judea, whose

residence was in Caesarea on the coast, rode up to Jerusalem in order to be present in the city in case there were riots at Passover, the most politically volatile of the annual Jewish festivals. With him came soldiers and cavalry to reinforce the imperial garrison in Jerusalem.

It is clear what Pilate's procession was about. By proclaiming the pomp and power of empire, its purpose was to intimidate. But what about Jesus's procession, his entry into the city?. ...

Thus for Passover that year, two very different processions entered Jerusalem. They proclaimed two very different and contrasting visions of how this world can and should be: the kingdom of God versus the kingdoms, the powers, of this world.

The former is about justice and the end of violence. The latter are about domination and exploitation.

On Friday, the rulers of this world kill Jesus. On Easter, God says "yes" to Jesus and "no" to the powers that executed him.

Thus Palm Sunday announces the central conflict of Holy Week. The conflict persists. In words from Saint Paul, the rulers of this world crucified the Lord of glory. That conflict continues wherever injustice and violence abound. Holy Week is not about less than that.¹

3

Luke may not have the royal waving of the palm branches. None of the gospel stories mention any war horses, soldiers, or a forceful and triumphant march into town. Some may even wonder if Jesus is a pushover in the face of the military entrance on the other side of town. But Luke gives us a hint of the strength of Jesus when he suggested that even the stones will shout if everyone else remains silent.

That seems to suggest that we have a role in the story too, that we can shout with the stones and raise a ruckus when we see things that are not right. That's something that Disciples pastor William Barber has been doing as he brings people together to stand against racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation, and to speak on behalf of health care, education, and housing. This movement known as the Poor People's Campaign has been spreading across the nation, and this summer, they will march in Washington D.C., reminding our nation to listen to these important issues.

Last Sunday evening I met with local members of the Poor People's Campaign to support Hahkeem Layman who was wrongly detained in his own front yard by a police officer without reason or warrant, which led to Hahkeem being accused of resisting arrest. Although the mayor and chief of police in Elkhart have advocated that this case be dropped, and the police officer has been fired for wrongdoing, the prosecuting attorney still wants a trial. This young man and his family continue to experience one delay after another in ending this injustice. As we stood together and prayed for this family, it's as though the stones themselves cried out.

Just as Jesus recognized the misuse of power in his day, many see how authority is misused today. As we continue our journey to the cross, may your voice join with the stones in crying out against the kind of oppression that killed Jesus, and against the kind of injustice that still exists today. Walk with Jesus, listen for the shouting stones, and join the chorus.

¹ Marcus Borg, "Holy Week: Palm Sunday,"
www.patheos.com/blogs/marcusborg/2014/03/holy-week-palm-sunday/