

March 24, 2013, Palm Sunday

Psalm 118, Luke 19:28-40

Get Noisy!

Once upon a time, when I was a little girl, my grandparents lived in Pasadena just half a block from Colorado Blvd., where the Rose Parade is held every New Year's Day. So every New Year's Eve, my family----five kids plus parents---drove out Foothill Blvd (this was before the 210) to Pasadena. We stayed overnight to watch the parade the next day.

We always had a front row seat reserved by family members. They set out chairs the night before and then guarded them through the night.

In the morning, armed with blankets and hot chocolate, we would go early to wait for the parade. Some years it was very cold and we wore knit hats and mittens as we waited.

Some years it was wet and we took umbrellas. But we always sat there waiting in great anticipation and excitement. We were never quiet about it, except to hush for a moment and listen so we could hear if the first band was coming yet!

Oh, and then when we caught the first notes of the trumpets or the first beat of the drums!

Oh, then! We would stand up and cheer, and clap and whistle!

We would hear the parade before we could see it, and then we couldn't hear it any more for all the noise everyone was making!

Stand and shout! Stand and cheer and clap!

The parade is coming!

We had waited and waited for what seemed like a long time for it, and now it was here!!

Suddenly we were no longer cold or tired or impatient. What we had waited for so long was here, and we would not be silent!!

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The people who lined the road to Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday had been waiting for a long time for a king who would kick the Romans out of Israel and free the country from outside occupation. The Bible had promised them that a king would come once again, someone descended from the great King David and the wise King Solomon.

This is what the people were waiting for, a warrior king like David who would win the fight against the Romans, a wise king who would restore Israel to the glory it had known under Solomon.

The people knew that Jesus was a great teacher. And they had seen or heard about the healings and about the raising of Lazarus from the dead, about the feeding of the 5000 with only 5 loaves and 2 fish. They may even have heard about the walking on water and the calming of the storm.

All of this led them to the conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah, God's Promised One, the king of David's lineage who would liberate them from their Roman oppressors and restore sovereignty to the nation of Israel.

After all, he had told them that he had come to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim that the year of the Lord had arrived. All of this had been prophesied in scripture. It was what the Messiah, the Christ, would do.

And so, the people knew that the Messiah had arrived! They lined the road, waiting! When he came by, they cheered and sang and shouted!

Jesus, however, did not say anything, at least not that we have a record of. We don't even know if he smiled or waved to the crowd.

The crowd made all the noise, so much noise that the religious authorities, the Pharisees, asked him to make them be quiet. I guess they knew that they wouldn't be able to hush the people. Or maybe they had tried and been totally ignored.

They were worried that the noisy crowd would attract the attention of the Roman militia and that bad things would happen as a result.

Maybe many people would die if the Romans saw this as an insurgent uprising, an attempt at revolution. The Pharisees were just acting in the best interest of the people in wanting them to be quiet.

But Jesus knew that quieting the crowd would do no good. The excitement, the anticipation, and the presence of the Holy Spirit were so thick that even if the crowd could be silenced, nature itself would take up the cheers. Jesus says the very stones would cry out if the people were silent!

Imagine it! Rocks crying out!

It wasn't only people who were waiting for the Messiah! All of creation was waiting as well!

All of creation waiting for the Creator! In the beginning was the Word, we read in the first chapter of the Gospel according to John, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. By the Word, that is, by Christ, all things came into being!

Christ was the agent of creation, and creation, which includes rocks and people and everything else, was excited and filled with joy at Christ's presence!

And so the people shouted and sang. But if the people had been silent, there still would have been shouts and songs of Hosanna and hallelujah, coming from the rocks, the trees, and everything else around! Imagine it! The hills alive with the sound of music----but more than a song! An ecstasy of praise!

The arrival of the Messiah was incredibly good news! The people had been oppressed for longer than anyone could remember. They had been taught the old stories of God's care and mercy, of liberation from slavery in Egypt, and more.

And now, in their own lifetimes, here was proof of God's love! Proof in the person of Jesus Christ, the Messiah! Close enough to touch. I doubt that anyone was sitting at home, quietly, when Jesus was passing by! Not on that first Palm Sunday!

If I told you that Jesus Christ was getting off the freeway right now and making his way here, what would you do? I don't think any of us would sit here quietly and wait.

I have a friend who is a Presbyterian minister. She is NOT a quiet person---that's the understatement of the year!----but she often repeats a common nickname for Presbyterians---the Frozen Chosen!



Now, Methodists have historically had too much fire, too much of a “burning heart” to be called “frozen.” That fire is shown on our cross and flame symbol, after all.

But the reality is that too many United Methodists, too many of US just sit quietly in church, then go out and spend the week being very quiet about our faith.

And yet, if we accept the gracious gift of love that God has offered to us, if we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, HOW CAN WE BE QUIET???

Again, I say HOW?? When God has given us the greatest gift of love ever given? HOW? When the spirit of Christ lives among us, within us?

How can we be quiet about it??

Now, I am not saying that we should go out and knock on doors asking people if they know about Jesus Christ. I am not saying that we should hold up signs in public places or shout on street corners. But if you want to, more power to you!

What I AM saying is this----if we are excited enough about our children being student of the month to put a bumper sticker on our car,

If we are excited enough about the Lakers or the Angels---or the Dodgers!----to put a flag or a special license plate frame on our cars,

If we can tell our friends to watch American Idol or NCIS because they are too good to miss,

If we can recommend a movie or a great restaurant,

Then why can't we seem to share our excitement about knowing Jesus Christ?

If we can stand up for a parade, for marching bands and floats and horses

Then why do we sit so comfortably in church?

Why are we sitting so quietly when there is so much to be excited about?

Are we waiting for Jesus to ride by? What is it that we are waiting for Jesus to do for us? We live in a free country, so we don't need a king to kick out any occupying forces, and that's not the kind of king that Jesus is, anyway.

Maybe we are waiting for him to free us from fear. Or a meaningless life. Or hopelessness. Or guilt or death.

Maybe we are in need of healing or comfort or peace.

Jesus Christ can give us all that, if we let him. Maybe we believe that he has already given us that, but we believe it with our heads!

Maybe our hearts don't quite realize it yet.

Someone once pointed out that the longest 8 inches in the world is the distance between your head and your heart. Maybe it's time for everything you have learned about God to complete that 8 inch journey, time for that head knowledge to dig deeper, to the deepest place in your being, to the center of your soul.

Because if we don't know for real in our hearts that God loves us,

If we are still waiting for Jesus to come by and we don't know that he is already here, then it makes sense that we are quiet. It makes sense to let someone else do the work of God.

It makes sense that we are not excited about the gospel of Jesus Christ if we don't believe it with all our heart!

It makes sense, if that's the case, that we are more than willing to sit quietly in the pews!

If we don't know that God's love for us is real and powerful,

Jesus will ride the donkey right past us as our eyes are shut and we are sitting with our heads down, keeping warm under our blankets of fear and insecurity, caps of uncertainty pulled down to protect our ears.

And we will never know he is so close to us!

And the rocks will start shouting! Rocks will shout!

And I ask you!

I ask you!!!

WHY SHOULD ROCKS HAVE ALL THE JOY?!?!?!?!?!?

It is up to us to open our hands and hearts and accept the gifts of grace and peace and mercy and joy that Christ brings to us, to hold his love in our hearts as something real and powerful. It is up to us to be courageous enough to allow his love to change us, to break us out of our comfort zones into something new and exciting.

And then we will have no choice but to stand and shout, to be excited and enthusiastic about the possibilities that the redemption of Jesus has opened to us.

Don't let the rocks shout! Let's praise Jesus Christ for all he has done, is doing, and will do among us!!

HALLELUJAH!! Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is the one who comes even now in the name of God!

Amen!