

The Rocks Have Spoken

My favorite Scripture verses related to Palm Sunday and the Triumphal Entry, are Luke 19:39-40: "Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!' But He answered and said to them, 'I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.'"

For some reason, that thought has always captured my imagination. I would like to meet a talking rock. What would I say to a talking rock anyway? How about "I hardly know you?" or "Why such a stone face?" or how about "Have you ever been to the Hard Rock cafe?" I might ask that stone, "Are you related to any of those boxers named 'Rocky'?"

And, if stones could talk, what would stones say to us? How about "a pebble for your thoughts," or "I marble at all your moving parts," or "Why did you cut me up to make all those ugly busts on Mt. Rushmore? It would be interesting to carry on a conversation with a stone . . . the whole idea sort of cracks me up.

But then again, stones do tell a story. In 1849 some 80,000 prospectors rushed to California to mine gold from among the stones. Many sacrificed their lives and their fortunes in the pursuit. The stones tell of man's greed, his crazed fixation on striking it rich, his lust for wealth and power.

Stones also tell of man's tendency toward idolatry; his lack of trust in the invisible God that has driven him to find comfort in stones carved in the shapes of various birds, snakes, animals, and mortal men, and then to worship those stone idols as gods.

Stones tell of man's ingenuity which all too often ends up in arrogance: The man-made stones used in the tower of Babel, the cut stones of pyramids and temples, the stones used to build great roads, aqueducts, and dams all have a story to tell.

Stones also speak of man's violence. There are stone castles and stone slinging catapults to knock them down. There are stones to be fired from sling shots and in some places in our world, stones are still thrown to punish sinners, and to discourage anyone from deviating from the mores of the community.

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Some stones, built into altars, carved into crosses, and laid to form cathedrals, tell of man's reverence for and allegiance to the God of the Bible.

Stones speak of David's courage when he slew Goliath and remain symbols of the struggle of the poor against the machines of the rich and powerful who oppress them.

Stones speak of tenderness and respect when we erect them over the graves of loved ones or use them to dedicate monuments to our fallen heroes.

So, you see, stones--though they have no physical voice--still have a lot to say. They know it all, have seen it all. They've seen us at our worst and at our best, and some day these stones will testify for or against us. For anyone who knows how to read it, the history of human civilization has been recorded in the stones.

There is another way we can relate to this Scripture: "If the disciples of Jesus be silent, the stones will cry out." I think of members of churches that were once filled with ardor and adoration for the Lord. I think of what happens when those believers get complacent and fall away from their relationship with Christ. I have seen stone churches torn down or turned into museums as a testimony against them. It is a mournful, accusing, witness those stones and bricks speak against those who have failed to pass on the torch of faith to the next generation. The wailing wall in Jerusalem is not the only monument to man's disobedience to God. If we listen carefully, we will hear stones crying out all over this city and throughout our land. The stones condemn our lukewarm love for Jesus, cry out against our lack of concern for lost souls, accuse us of our selfishness and lack of commitment to the mission God gave us. O, let us listen to what the stones have to say!

Stones certainly play an important role in helping to tell the story of Jesus. He was born in a stable undoubtedly built of stone or set within a natural stone cave. Jesus was tempted with a stone during his battle against Satan in the wilderness. In Luke 4:1-3 we read, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.'"

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In Matthew 3:9, Jesus says to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham." Jesus revealed His authority over evil spirits by healing the madman of Gadara, who was always "crying out and cutting himself with stones." Jesus told a parable about a man who built his house on a rock, and by so doing preserved his property in a time of storm. Jesus established the Church through His words to Peter, in Matthew 16:18 Jesus says, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." In John 11:39, Jesus stood outside a tomb and told the family and friends of Lazarus: "Take away the stone."

Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem by telling his disciples that the time would come when there would not be one stone left upon the other. Jesus' life was threatened by stones. John 8:59 says, "At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds." And, John 10:31 says, "Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him. . . ." We know that Jesus died on a cross, but had God willed it, his death could just as easily been accomplished with stones. Jesus was brought before Pilate for judgment in a place known as "the Stone Pavement."

Yes, the stones have quite a story to tell, and if we listen closely, we can even hear the proclamation of the Gospel. It's all written in the stones.

But there is one stone story that trumps and overshadows all the rest. After the crucifixion of Jesus had been completed, Luke 23:50-53 tell us what happened to His body: "Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid." Matthew 27:60 adds, "He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away." Pilate then ordered the stone to be guarded, Matthew 27:66 says, "So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard." So Jesus was slaughtered and placed in a rock-hewn tomb, sealed with a huge stone.

You know the rest of the story, The women worried, the guards were silenced, the stone was rolled, the angel sat! The whole story is written in the stones.

But then again, maybe not. In one regard, the story is not complete. Matthew 21:33-44 record the words of Jesus

"Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a wine press in it and built a watch tower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

I Peter 2:6-8 say,

"For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,' and, 'A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they

disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for."

The point of these verses, of course, is this: Jesus Christ is the stone rejected by men but chosen of God to be the capstone. And, depending on how we relate to Him, He will either be the foundation stone and the keystone of our lives, or He will be to us the stumbling stone and rock of offense. If we believe in Him, obey His commandments, and build our lives upon Him, we will become living temples in whom the Holy Spirit lives and shows God's love to the world. He will be our sure foundation, our secure fortress in time of attack and storm, the stone that holds our lives together in time of adversity.

But if we choose to live without Him, preferring to give His place in our lives to others and to other things, then He becomes our stumbling stone and rock of offense, a stone cold testimony against us, and a millstone of condemnation around our necks. If anyone hardens his or her heart against Jesus, the arrogance of that person will be crushed. The question each one of us needs to answer this morning is this: what are we doing with Jesus? Are we standing firm upon Him or fighting against Him?

The irony of Jesus' words, "the stones will cry out," is that that is exactly what happened. The crowd turned against Jesus, the authorities condemned Him, and His disciples **were** silenced. And when that happened darkness descended, the earth rocked, rock tombs were opened, and the stone covering the tomb of Jesus was rolled away. It's all written in the stones. They did cry out. And what they said was "**Easter.**"

The Fourth Street Church of God

2001 Fourth Street
Altoona, PA 16601

942-1007/ 946-4110

Sermon for April 1, 2007

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Luke 19:28-47

Jon R. Neely, Pastor