

“The Stones Will Shout” GPPC 3-20-16
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29, Luke 19:28-40

Does anybody here know the term, “effective frequency”? In the advertising world, it’s “the number of times a person must be exposed to an advertising message before a response is made and before exposure is considered wasteful.” (Wikipedia) How many times do you need to see or hear the message before you notice it and then respond? The advertising experts argue about the number required, of course. Some say three times is sufficient. “Buy our product. Buy our product. Buy our product. Bam!” Others say seven is the magic number. But back in 1885 Thomas Smith wrote the handbook *Successful Advertising*, and he claimed *twenty times* was the charmed amount. How many times do you think it takes? If you watch the ads on TV, especially the political ads, well, maybe Thomas Smith won that argument.

And how many times does it take for us to buy into the gospel of Jesus Christ? How many times do we need to see who Jesus truly was and is so we will fully invest ourselves in his reign? What does it take not merely to grab our attention but to capture our hearts?

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Luke says Jesus headed up to Jerusalem. He neared the end of three years of public ministry for the hungry and hurting, sick and excluded. Jesus prepared to come into Jerusalem for the last time. And he knew what awaited him—betrayal, a kangaroo court, suffering, and death. But first preparations had to be made.

Luke spends several verses telling us details about the arrangements. When Jesus and the disciples got to the Mount of Olives, Jesus said “Go into town and make off with a colt that’s never been ridden. Anybody complains, just say ‘the Lord needs it.’” It sounds like a divine license to steal, doesn’t it?

Luke says the disciples went into the town and found the colt. And just when they were cashing in their five finger discount, the owners said, “Hey, what’s going on?” And the disciples said, “Oh, the Lord needs it.” And apparently the owners were fine with that answer, because Luke doesn’t even bother to record their response. We only hear that the disciples brought the colt to Jesus.

Weird, isn’t it? What is Luke trying to say?

He's reminding us that what happened in Jerusalem 2000 years ago was not mere chance. The terrible events in that city were shaped by God for God's holy inscrutable purpose. Somehow in some mysterious and deeply troubling way, God's fingerprints are all over what finally occurred in Jerusalem. Yet the point is clear; Jesus came into Jerusalem not as a mere victim whose life would be snatched away. He came as the Lord who would give his life for the sake of the universe.

So the disciples brought the colt to Jesus. And they put their cloaks on it, and they set Jesus on the colt, like people might hoist a sports champion onto their shoulders in victory. "You got him? Don't drop him." "Yeah, I got him." And in Luke's account, there were no palm branches or other branches for the parade. Instead, the people put their cloaks on the road in front of Jesus, so that the colt might tromp on this makeshift victory carpet. And we can only guess that these people, most of them not wealthy, probably didn't own more than one or two cloaks. So they sacrificed what they owned to honor Jesus with this strange, ragtag parade that's the prelude to worship, a processional for worship.

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As Jesus clomped along on a little colt (not a war stallion) the disciples shouted, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, And glory in the highest heaven!”

The people sacrificed their cloaks, something precious in order to praise Jesus. And when they shouted that Jesus was “the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” they took a risk with the Roman Empire. Their words might have been viewed as sedition. Traitors to the Roman Empire might have been tortured and killed. Empire never takes kindly to somebody else being called the authority, you know. The country must come first. Patriotism is the highest value, isn't it?

A few years ago, Duke Divinity School Professor William Willimon noted that the magazine *Vanity Fair* had enlisted the writing of a noted intellectual and despiser of all faiths in order to support the U.S. going to war in Iraq. And it puzzled Willimon that the editors would go this route, but then he figured it out. He said, “If we are going to unite this country, marching in step as one, so convinced of our righteousness and of the impossibility of any solution to the world's problems other than what we

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impose, then we can't have anyone running around loose who believes that ultimately there may be some judge more authoritative and truthful than public opinion this week. One of the greatest challenges of being Christian today is to believe that the sovereign God who dies on the cross for the whole world is jealous of national sovereignty." (William Willimon, *Who Will Be Saved?* 57-58.)

So every Sunday we stroll into this sanctuary, pray the prayers, sing the hymns, listen to the word, and join disciples in every time and place to reaffirm that Christ alone is king. In those seemingly innocuous Sunday School classes and confirmation classes, we protest against the notion that Caesar or the President or the Democratic Party or the Republican Party or Wall Street is Lord. To borrow language from novelist Walker Percy, though some in our country operate from "a theology of hatred," when we bring our children into Sunday School, and Vacation Bible School, and worship we are training them in the deeply subversive message that Christ is Lord and our mission in life is to follow him with love. And as Luke shows us again and again and

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again (effective frequency) Christ's lordship is humble not arrogant, gentle not harsh, self-giving not self-serving.

No wonder we sometimes skip church and look for excuses to avoid commitment. No wonder we occasionally choose the god of materialism, the goddess of comfort, the religion of sports and recreation above Christ as Lord. Choosing to march in the Jesus parade costs us something valuable as it did those disciples who threw down their cloaks. Choosing to proclaim Jesus as sovereign might be inconvenient or risky as it was for those disciples who shouted praise no matter what the Roman Empire might have said or done.

The Pharisees, God bless their little Grinch hearts, at least understood that what the disciples were doing was dangerous. "Teacher, order your disciples to stop," they said. But Jesus answered, "If these were silent, the stones would shout out."

If these followers of Jesus were silent, the very stones of the earth would shout out.

Presbyterian writer Frederick Buechner says, "All churches everywhere. The day will come when they will lie in ruins, every last

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one of them. The day will come when all the voices that were ever raised in them, including our own, will be permanently stilled. But when that day comes, I believe that the tumbled stones will cry aloud of the great, deep hope that down through the centuries has been the one reason for having churches at all and is the one reason we have for coming to this one now: the hope that into the world the King does come. And in the name of the Lord. And is always coming blessed be he. And will come afire with glory, at the end of time.” (Frederick Buechner, *A Room Called Remember*, 35.)

It’s tempting for us to become discouraged, isn’t it? We look at the world where people are hungry and homeless, where folks are attacked and killed by self-deceived terrorists, where idolatries of apathy, self-centeredness, arrogance, and grievance fracture national and world unity. We look at our own lives, good, yet also infected by brokenness, sin, heartache, and failure. And maybe we are tempted to despair.

But Jesus came into Jerusalem of his volition. He knew what awaited him. But he came into Jerusalem to show us yet again what he is like—humble, gentle, dedicated to God and God’s love. He came as an

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example for us to follow, yes. And finally he came to promise God's love for us all and the victory of God's love for the world. Nothing and nobody can ultimately stop God's love. And nothing and nobody can finally shut up this good news. You see, even if they tried, the stones would shout out. ©Jeff Paschal