

SILENCING THE LAMBS

Palm Sunday Year C

Is. 50:4-9a; Ps. 118:1-2, 19-29; Phil. 2:5-11; Lk. 19:28-40 Tannum Sands 10/04/2022

A visiting preacher was really getting the congregation moving. Near the end of his sermon he said, "This church has really got to walk," to which someone in the back yelled, "Let her walk preacher." The preacher then said, "If this church is going to go it's got to get up and run," to which someone again yelled with gusto, "Let her run preacher." Feeling the surge of the church, the preacher then said with even louder gusto, "If this church is going to go it's got to really fly," and once again with ever greater gusto, someone yelled, "Let her fly preacher, let her fly." The preacher then seized the moment and stated with even greater gusto, "If this church is really going to fly it's going to need money." There was silence. Then someone in the back seat called out, "Let her walk preacher, let her walk."

Many of us are willing to cry out in support for things—as long as it doesn't cost us anything. We're willing to get behind a good and just cause—willing to encourage others—willing to say, "Yes!"—just so long as it doesn't challenge us to do something or require us to move out of our comfort zone. You have all heard the saying, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." Well in many places, the church included, it's more like, "When the going gets tough, we set up a task group to investigate the situation and hope that eventually, if we procrastinate for long enough, it'll go away and we won't have to deal with it." That is *not* Christian discipleship.

Being a Christian requires more than just lip service, it requires people to stand up and shout it from the rooftops—to shout it from their workplaces—to shout it from their churches—to shout out the wonderful, glorious, freeing gospel of Jesus Christ.

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey, the crowds shouted out in support. "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!" O how easy it is to go with the flow. How easy it is to add your voice to the popular voice of the crowd—to join with others in what seems to be fashionable at the time. But O how quickly the tide can turn—how quickly opinions change when you are required to stand out from the crowd—perhaps even to stand against the crowd.

At all the shouting and commotion, the Pharisees, who must have been very interested in Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, called out to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop shouting." What were they afraid of? Perhaps they thought it was all just a bit too much. Jesus was a pretty good guy and all, but this was kind of ridiculous—a triumphal procession with the shouting of adoring admirers, not to mention talk of Jesus as a new king? It was downright embarrassing.

Or perhaps their concern had more to do with self-preservation. People would notice what was happening and the word would get out. The Romans would not exactly be pleased with those who made claims to be some kind of a ruler. Some Roman soldiers—perhaps the riot squad—were likely to show up and disperse the crowd—and one could assume that they would be none too gentle about it. There might be a crackdown on the population during the week of Passover, which nobody needed or wanted. Whatever their reason, they were worried and they implored Jesus to quieten down the crowd to something that was somewhat less noticeable.

Jesus responds to their request in a manner that was a little unusual. "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." What did Jesus mean by that? What happens when the voice of the church is stifled? And what is it that the stones will cry out?

There are many in our world today who would like to silence those who follow Christ—those whom Jesus refers to as his lambs. Not all of them are obvious. We're aware of some of those who openly reject the message of the gospel—some of them are very vocal. Today, we hear loud voices from those we might refer to as neo-atheists—Richard Dawkins and the like. But there are others who are not so vocal who quietly go about undermining the faith of Christians. There are many ways in which attempts are made to silence the lambs. People are not always conscious of them but they are there nevertheless—in our media, in our politics, and in many other aspect of our society in general.

What, then, are some of the things that set out to silence the lambs?

Unbelief is one of those things. It was unbelief that prevented the Hebrew people from entering the Promised Land when they should have—and caused them to stay wandering in the desert for another 40 years. Even among Christians today there is

often a pervading sense of attraction to the status quo—a sort of disbelief that God can and does work within us and influence our own lives. It's so often this kind of unbelief that prevents us from experiencing kingdom life in all its fullness.

Another thing that tends to silence the lambs are the spirits of negativity and criticism. These often result when things don't happen the way we want them to happen—or don't happen the way we have been used to them happening. Negativity and criticism is a blight on the church because it's a denial of the gospel—a denial of God's grace for all.

And there are other things related to these, such as gossiping and unforgiveness. These things set out to silence the lambs because they ask us to focus on less important things, rather than sharing the truth of the gospel with one another in a spirit of love, compassion, forgiveness and mercy. They silence the lambs because when you are either engaging in gossip or unforgiveness or are the victim of gossip or unforgiveness, you cannot fully answer God's call upon your life.

Perhaps one of the greatest silencer of the lambs is fear—fear of the unknown—fear of what might happen if I accept the challenge of God's call on my life. It's very disconcerting when something you're not quite sure of, threatens to upset your own personal status quo. When that happens, the tendency is to try to stifle the voice of those who want to move forward rather than staying where they are.

Sometimes people want to remain in control over people or circumstances and so any threat to that control, will end up in a challenge to those who want to obey God's call.

Sometimes it's too hard to step outside of your comfort zone—you don't want to be challenged, and so, like the Pharisees, you want to silence those who shout their hosannas—those who would want to challenge you with the truth or move you in other directions.

The truth, is that eventually—bombarded by peer pressure and shallow resolve—people *do* stop crying out. A week later, along the Via Dolorosa, as Jesus carried his cross to Golgotha, the shouts of hosanna had changed to jeers. The lambs had been silenced. As Jesus hung on the cross with just his mother and John there to share his pain, all the

other disciples were in hiding, fearful of what might happen to them. The lambs had been silenced.

But the wonderful truth of what Jesus was saying, when he told the Pharisees that “the stones would cry out,” is that no matter what happens—no matter if the lambs have been silenced—no matter what forces there are to silence the voice of the truth of who Christ is—the proclamation of the good news of the gospel will never cease. God will always raise up faithful people to proclaim his love. The church is not about to die out. There will always be those who will stand up and shout out the truth of the gospel.

There is no way you can suppress the voice of God’s love—no way you can suppress the voice of God’s peace—no way you can suppress the voice of God’s justice—no way you can suppress the voice of God’s forgiveness. If all the voices—if even the multitudes were unable to proclaim God’s message of love and peace, justice and forgiveness to the world—the stones themselves would cry out—creation itself would proclaim the glory and the majesty of God.

But don’t leave it to the stones. Don’t allow yourself to be silenced by fear or be threatened by those who are confronted by the authentic Christian life. The challenge for each of us is that our very lives ought shout out the truth of the gospel. And it is Jesus, the very one who led the procession into Jerusalem, and later that week the procession to Calvary, who gives us the power and strength to shout it out. Shout it out. Proclaim release for the captives, sight for the blind, and hearing for the deaf. Proclaim God’s mercy and the forgiveness of sin. Proclaim peace and salvation to all. Don’t be silenced. Shout it out. Shout out, and continue to shout out, the wonderful glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

To him be all the glory, honour, majesty and power. Amen.