

Palm Sunday
“Silent Stones Shouting”
April 14, 2019
New Philadelphia Moravian Church

Today is an important day for Christians around the world. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week and reminds us that Easter is only a week away. Today is also an important day in the life of our church. Today we are celebrating the fact that 9 young people have publicly proclaimed their faith in God as their Creator, in Jesus as their Redeemer, and in the Holy Spirit as their Sustainer. Like Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was a milestone in a long journey, our Confirmation class has also reached milestone in their lives and their faith journeys.

What Gracie, Georgia, Maggie, Beckett, Mercer, Ryan, Paul, and Zach have done is to accept for themselves the covenant that their parents made when they were baptized. And what Ava has done is that she has publicly accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior and has been baptized in his name and into his death. But this is not something that any of them have done on the spur of the moment, or because they thought they should, or because it was the “cool” thing to do. No, they have been able to make their public proclamation of faith only after a long process of study and prayer and discussion and reflection.

Together we have been meeting twice a month for the last eight months. And we have talked about what it means to believe in God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. We have talked about what it means to live a life of faith and willing obedience. We have shared the highs and lows of our daily lives, we have shared the joys and the struggles. And today they are ready to take this next step. But notice I said that Confirmation is a milestone in their faith journey. It is not a conclusion. It is not an end unto itself. It is rather the next step, albeit an important step, in the journey that they are taking with Jesus.

Today I am proud of them. Well I am ALWAYS proud of them. But today especially, I am proud of them for the work they have done. I am proud of them for the people that they are. And I am looking forward to watching them continue to grow in faith, love, and hope, as they continue to become the people that God has created them to be. Though they have arrived at their Confirmation and should feel a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment, I want them to know that their journey is far from over.

On the day of my Confirmation, some 36 years ago, I was given this verse from Philippians as my confirmation text- *I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.* To my Confirmation Class (to Gracie and Georgia and Maggie and Beckett and Mercer and Ryan and Paul and Zach and Ava) I tell you that God has begun a good work in you and I am proud to be with you today and I promise to be with you in love and support and prayer until you arrive at that completion on the day of Jesus Christ.

It is fitting that we are celebrating your Confirmation today. For just as you have arrived at this day, Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem. Yet he knows (and we know) that the journey is not complete. There is still a long way to go. But for today, let us focus on the fact that the long awaited Messiah has come. Salvation is here. And every little thing is going to be alright. For that's what Palm Sunday is all about. It's why today is a great day of rejoicing and celebrating. It's why we sing *Hosanna* and wave palm branches. For Jesus is our Messiah. He is our Savior. He is coming in the name of the Lord to save us.

However, if you were paying really close attention to the Scripture reading from Luke that we just heard, you may have noticed that the story we read isn't quite the same as the familiar Palm Sunday story that we all know. There were a couple of

important things missing. Let's see who noticed what isn't in Luke's version of Jesus triumphal entry...

That's right. There are NO palms on Palm Sunday. And there are no shouts of *Hosanna!* So maybe, in the interest of Biblical accuracy-at least in the interest of being true to today's Scripture- maybe we should have someone come and gather up all those nice palm crosses that many of you are wearing. And maybe we should sing a different hymn at the end of our service and ditch the Hosanna anthem.

Maybe instead everyone should take off their cloaks and spread them out on the aisles of the sanctuary. And maybe we should pass out stones to everyone. Kind of like this one (HOLD UP ROCK) For one thing that Luke does have is stones. He has Jesus telling the Pharisees, who want him to order his disciples to be quiet, that even if they were to stop shouting and singing, if they were silent "the stones would shout out."

So maybe that is how we should celebrate Palm Sunday. At least in the years where Luke is our gospel reading. It would certainly be interesting. But it doesn't look like many people here are wearing cloaks. Actually Larry and I may be wearing the closest things to cloaks with our surplices. And I don't think that we have enough rocks to give to everyone. And I know that I REALLY want to sing *Hosanna* and I feel certain that all of you to do too. So let's just stick with doing Palm Sunday the way that we are used to doing it. Let's keep our palms and let's sing our *Hosanna*.

But let's not forget about those rocks, those stones that would sing out (SHOUT OUT) if the disciples were silent. Because I think it is the most important part of Luke's version of the Palm Sunday story. The day of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem was not only a day of great rejoicing for the people who were there, for the people who had been longing and waiting and hoping a praying for a Messiah; it is not only a day of great joy

for us who know that Jesus is our Savior; but it is a day of great rejoicing for ALL of creation.

As Paul wrote to the Colossians:

Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Through Jesus, God redeems and reconciles all things to himself. He joins together heaven and earth, the divine and the human as he brings salvation to all of God's creation. And those who know Jesus know this and can't help but proclaim it.

Sing O heaven, and be joyful O earth for the glory of the Lord shall be revealed!
The glory of the Lord is Jesus and he has come to save us and to save all the world. We can't help but sing and shout our praises to him and for him! We can't be silent when God comes to us. And he doesn't come to call us to account, or to condemn us, or to chastise us, but he comes to bring us salvation, to reconcile us and all creation to God.

We can't be silent in the face of God's great glory that is seen in Jesus who, *though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.*

When we think about who Jesus is and what he has done for us, we can't be silent. For if we are, if we are silent and fail to sing praises to God, if we fail to proclaim

the glory of God that has been revealed in Christ Jesus, then someone else will do it for us. Then these silent stones will shout out.

And I don't think that we should let that happen. For God sent us Jesus to save us and *God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Yet when I look around this world, I don't see every knee bending, I don't hear every tongue confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. So I don't think that we should remain silent in the face of the glory of God as it is being revealed to us and among us. I don't think we should allow these stones to do what we are called to do. We've got a lot of work left to do. So let us keep on singing and shouting praises to God. Let us keep on crying *Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord!* until our work is done. Until that day comes when every knee bends before him and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord.

In fact, we are getting ready to do so right now. We are getting ready to do what we do every Palm Sunday, no matter what Luke's gospel says. We are getting ready to sing *Hosanna!* But first we need to set the stage a little more. We need to prepare the way of the Lord. And we need more palms and we need more cloaks. So I need some volunteers. Don't worry if you aren't wearing a cloak. We actually have plenty. And we have plenty of palms. But I need some people to come up and help lay them out on the aisles of our Sanctuary so that we can see and remember and know what it was like when Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

So we can sing Hosanna and keep on shouting our praises until that day that every knee bends and EVERY tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord. It is time for us to be the multitude that welcomes Jesus, not just into Jerusalem, but into New Philadelphia, into Winston-Salem, into North Carolina, into the United States, into the entire world.

Hosanna, blessed is he that comes in the name of Lord! Hosanna in the highest!
Let us let these silent stones SHOUT!