

## “Even the Stones Cry Out” by Pastor Leah Rosso

Luke 19: 28-40

April 13, 2025 (Palm Sunday)

Pastor Susie volunteers at her son's school once a week, right at the beginning of school. So on Tuesdays, rather than dropping him off, she parks and walks in to Madison Elementary. And before she gets to the classroom where she will do whatever project the teachers need her to prep that day, she enjoys watching the chaos around her. There are kids in groups being loud because they're excited to be there; there are kids walking alone trying not to be noticed; there are kids dreading their math tests and kids confident they will do well; there are kids with no coats and kids with the latest name brand gear. There are kids who are hungry and walk straight to the cafeteria for breakfast, and kids who are already too full. And everywhere you look there are all kinds of haircuts and heights and attitudes as they walk through those doors, as they all choose, day after day, to enter the building and be part of the community that is Madison. It is a procession of humanity as each day those brave kids process into the building— some joyfully, some hesitatingly, some in protest— but all together creating a picture of what it means to be human.

Maybe that's a strange parallel to make to our scripture this morning, but the way Luke describes it, this is a crowd of people with all different motivations; all different expectations; all different life experiences; all different reasons for being there at all. Some are self conscious, some are sure they're in the right place. And just like elementary school kids, Luke tells us that the crowd *isn't* sure of where this is headed.

I want you to think for a moment about the processions in your own life. If you graduated from high school or college, you've walked in a procession. If you've gotten married, most likely there was a procession of some sort, where you walked to meet your beloved. We have funeral processions, not only inside church, but sometimes on the roads— processions of cars moving slowly from church to cemetery. And each procession, whether it was for something thrilling or sad or honoring someone we love, they have a few things in common:

- 1) Processions by their very nature create a flow and momentum towards a future that we aren't sure about yet.
- 2) Processions disrupt other parts of our lives, marking an ending or a beginning or a change that is happening.
- 3) And most processions recognize a life choice that has been made somewhere along the way.

Palm Sunday is no different. Jesus' ministry has been gaining momentum, building in numbers and in fame as he has been healing people, feeding people, and preaching

about God's Kingdom. And while the people are getting a vision from Jesus about what jubilee looks like; what God's justice looks like; what God's love looks like— no one can see it all perfectly. The momentum is gaining to go towards something they have to imagine is possible— they have to trust that God's ways are not our ways.

Palm Sunday also disrupts daily life. Here Jesus' political theater is acting out a prophecy from Zechariah — he is vividly telling these people of faith that jubilee is coming, that God's kingdom is here— and he does so not only by disrupting their lives as they become part of the processional, but he is disrupting the lives of the owners of the donkey; he is disrupting the lives of the religious leaders who are upset; he is disrupting the other political theater happening on the other side of town. After all, Jesus has timed this intentionally to happen at the same time that Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea, is riding in on war horse on the opposite side of Jerusalem. But Jesus chooses the prophecy from Zechariah, a prophecy about a humble Messiah who comes in peace, rather than a violent king bent on war. Jesus knows he won't be able to upstage the Roman army marching into town with all of their soldiers and fanfare and fear; but he also knows he can cause disruption— protesting the violence and greed and show of power that Rome is so intent on with his own show of love and grace and solidarity with the poor.

And so Jesus gets on a donkey and begins to make his way towards Jerusalem as the people around him take note of what he is doing and begin to sing. And in the middle of this diverse processional, the religious leaders take note and fear grips their heart. They question Jesus. They are offended by the joy of the people. And when they tell Jesus to make his followers stop, Jesus responds by saying, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

As strange as it might sound, on this Palm Sunday, Jesus states pretty clearly that this isn't just about Jesus. This isn't just about the disciples of Jesus. This isn't just about the religious leaders. This isn't just about the oppression of the Roman government. All of this is meant to point to the much larger picture of God's jubilee that Jesus has proclaimed over and over. This is about God's justice that Jesus has enacted time and again as he has lifted up those who had no power. This is about God's love that Jesus has been sharing with the people— all people— day in and day out from the beginning, and has been inviting others into sharing. It started in the very beginning as God proclaimed that all creation is good; that we are good; that everyone is created in God's image. And it flowed through Moses who led the people out of violence and slavery and a system of greed into a communal sharing of manna and mercy. It continued the prophets that reminded the people that God's love is for everyone; that hierarchy and greed won't get us to a place of health and wellness for all. It continued through Jesus, embodying God's love in such a specific and integrated way that we are at a loss as to how to describe his impact and reach. And it continues today as

Christ calls us to follow by pushing back on the fear; pushing back on the greed; resisting the lies that our lives are better when we just look out for ourselves, and to join together in a holy processional of people listening to one another; speaking the truths that need to be spoken or shouted or sung; working for justice for everyone; and keeping in front of us God's vision of what beloved community can look like in our world.

The Palm Sunday processional reminded me of a story I've heard many times about the deepest, darkest days of apartheid in South Africa. The government tried to silence those working to end apartheid by canceling a political rally. So instead, Archbishop Desmond Tutu declared that they all would worship. People gathered at St. George's Cathedral in Cape Town, South Africa, until it was overflowing with worshippers. Knowing this was happening, the police gathered outside. Hundreds of them surrounded the building in a show of force meant to intimidate. The worship service began in peace, but as Desmond Tutu was preaching, the police came inside, lining the walls. They were holding guns and some of them were writing down Tutu's words. But Tutu would not be intimidated. He preached against the evils of apartheid, declaring it could not endure. At one extraordinary point he decided to address the police directly:

*You are powerful. You are very powerful, but you are not gods and I serve a God who cannot be mocked. So, since you've already lost, since you've already lost, I invite you today to come and join the winning side!*

With that all of the worshipers erupted into singing and dancing. The police didn't know what to do. Their attempts at intimidation had failed, overcome by the Archbishop's confidence that God and goodness would triumph over evil. It was but a matter of time. (From Jim Wallis' book, *God's Politics*)

This has always been one of my favorite stories, but what makes it astonishing is that it didn't happen when it seemed inevitable that it would end. When Tutu made this statement, a statement he would make many times over, it didn't even seem possible that God was doing a new thing.

Jesus is even more confident than Desmond Tutu— he tells the Pharisees that if humans don't shout and sing, even the stones will cry out! The trees will weep. All of creation will reflect God's praise. But this isn't an excuse for us to then step out of the fray; rather, it is a call to action. All of creation is already singing God's praises; all of creation knows the truth; all of creation is joined with God in working towards a day of jubilee. Won't we join God and all creation? Won't we join the processional— not because we know what will happen— but because we trust that choosing God will transform us? That choosing love will lead to more love? That choosing goodness and

joy will lead to the whole world singing together? Can we trust that choosing to stand with the suffering will open our hearts to what it means to be human and choosing to proclaim the year of jubilee will bring freedom to everyone? Jesus chose to disrupt the powerful of his day; he chose to walk in the way of truth for all; he chose love each and every time— and his love is still changing lives today. May we open our hearts to God's movement and to God's Spirit, that we will sing of God's justice; that we will shout of God's mercy; that we will work for that day when God's jubilee is proclaimed and lived throughout the land.