

O, the Stories They Could Tell!

[Text - Luke 19:29-40]

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Back in the 70's when I was in seminary, one of my classmates had the opportunity to travel to the Holy Land. When she returned, I asked her what had impressed her most during her visit. Her response caught me off guard, and at first I thought she was kidding.

“That entire region is absolutely *full* of rocks!”

“No seriously, Elaine, what did you find most intriguing about the Holy Land?”

“It seems that no matter where you look, there are rocks *everywhere!*”

“Well, you could say the same thing about the Moon!”

“That’s true, but think about it, Dave - Jesus himself walked right past some of those rocks - he may have even touched them. Just imagine the history those rocks have seen; imagine the stories they could tell!”

In this morning’s Processional Gospel, some Pharisees say to Jesus, “Teacher, order your followers to stop shouting their praises.” Jesus replies, “I tell you, if these people were silent, the stones themselves would shout!” Of course, the people are *not* silent - they keep cheering Jesus onward, until he arrives at the Jerusalem temple; where he knocks-over the tables and drives-out the merchants and the money-changers. Then some of those cheerers change their tune: “Now wait a minute, Jesus. It’s one thing to get people all excited about God, but it’s another thing to challenge our traditions, or to change the way we do business.” So those voices no longer cheer...but others do continue.

Then Jesus tells the people that what God truly desires, is not our ritual practices, but our real participation in God’s restorative work

among the poor, the hungry, the sick, the oppressed, and the outcast. He even has the audacity to declare that whatever we do to the least of our brothers and sisters, God takes it *personally!* Jesus portrays a God who calls for those who *have*, to give to those who *don't* [that liberal socialist]! "Come on, Jesus, it's not our fault that these people are too lazy, or young, or old, or sick to work; you can't actually expect us to pick up the slack for these slackers!" And so more voices stop their praise, and reconsider their position...yet some still continue to rally around Jesus.

After all, Jesus does seem to have an inside track to God *Almighty*; and that's where you want to be! You want to be tight with the guy who's got God on speed-dial; someone who can call on that Heavenly Head Honcho to get you out of trouble, to protect you from suffering and danger; One who will take care of you, *and* take care of your enemies! But then...Jesus just goes too far. He has the nerve to say that we should *love* our enemies, pray for those who persecute us, and turn the other cheek [that timid pacifist]! Doesn't he realize what those foreign infidels have done to our country? Doesn't he understand that if you don't go on the offensive, you will look weak; if you make yourself vulnerable, you will get hurt; if you think that self-sacrificing love is more important than watching-out for Number One, then you could end up...nailed to a Cross? Doesn't Jesus see that these shouts of "Hosanna" can quickly disappear, and be replaced with *new* shouts of "Crucify Him"?

Actually, Jesus is quite aware that those cheers of celebration may soon turn into jeers of condemnation; that with the right manipulation, the leaders of the religious establishment can have that crowd singing a completely different tune. Nevertheless, Jesus continues to move steadily and boldly forward with his radically inclusive message of love and grace, forgiveness and peace. He knows that the praises of the people may well be silenced; yet his faith doesn't rest upon his popularity with the

people. It is anchored on a rock-solid trust in the Ultimate Goodness of God.

Jesus' unshakable belief in the benevolent Nature of the Divine Source of all things, gives him the freedom and the courage to lovingly embrace all of Life - even his often unreliable brothers and sisters. It's as if he intrinsically knows that the bedrock of Divine Love will uphold and sustain him, regardless of the changing winds and whims of human nature. So if the people stop their hosannas, that's O.K., because the Creation Itself will bear witness to the unwavering truth: That the Divine Life and Love which flows in and through Jesus Christ will continue beyond this physical dimension.

Maybe that *is* one of the notable things about the Holy Land. Down through the centuries, the people who have fought and bickered and bled over who "owns" that parcel of land, have all passed-on; yet the rocks still remain, as silent [or perhaps *not-so-silent*] reminders of that Eternal Rock of Ages. The One who rides into Jerusalem, proclaiming Divine Love for all people; The One who staggers-out of Jerusalem under the weight of a cross - still proclaiming Divine love for all people; The One whose Life and Love bursts-forth beyond the stone-sealed tomb on Easter morning; revealing once again God's unbounded and everlasting compassion for all people...including you and me.

There are many things in our world, and in our lives, that seem so unstable and unsettling - including our world and our lives themselves! Earthquakes and tsunamis, violence and viruses, radiation leaks and radiation treatments, broken bones, broken promises, shattered relationships - all kinds of distress, disasters, and dangers. Yet in the midst of the storms and struggles and suffering that surround us, one thing remains constant and

absolutely dependable: the Gracious Love of our Divine, Eternal Source! This is the one, solid rock upon which you and I can firmly stand, and securely build our entire lives. Hosanna! Thanks be to God!