March 20, 2016
Palm Sunday—CYCLE C

The weeks have passed all too quickly and now, with the sun setting, we are here with our Lord outside the silent stone walls of old Jerusalem. We have come a long way. We have witnessed this One now robed in love, as He fed the hungry, give sight to the blind and strength to the lame. We have heard stories about a woman accused of adultery and two lost sons. With our Lord walking before us, we now see him on the Mount of Olives rising to sit on a donkey whose back has never felt the weight of a human being.

If you are like me, you come to Palm Sunday, every year, with no small measure of wonder and dread. We know how the story ends this week, but somehow we don’t want to believe all over again. Like watching the classic film “Doctor Zhivago”, we know at the end Yuri will collapse and die alone on some nameless Moscow street having seen for the last time his beloved Lara on a streetcar he cannot stop. Yet
we watch the film again and again. So it is today as our Lord enters the city where he will suffer and die.

As Luke tells it, Jesus sends two of his disciples into Jerusalem to find a colt on which no one has ever ridden. “If someone asks what you are doing,” he says, “tell them the Lord needs it.” They go, find the animal, and just as Jesus imagined, are questioned. But all they need say is, “The Lord needs it” and they lead the colt away.

Time passes. They return with the donkey to find a large crowd gathered awaiting instruction. Jesus sits up on the beast that soon begins walking down the Mount of Olives in the direction of the city gate. With mob-like energy, the crowd goes before him, carpeting the dusty road with their coats extolling our Lord’s work saying:

“Blessed is the king, who comes in the name of Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

That boisterous, even wanton praise of Jesus does not sit well with some bystanders who happen to be religious leaders in all their self-
importance. “Order your disciples to stop!” they demand, but Jesus keeps moving and as he goes, he utters an unforgettable response. “I tell you, if these people were silent, the rocks would cry out.”

Is it possible to be silent on Palm Sunday? Oh yes, like you, I know what lies ahead. Because I know, because I’ve watched the film year after year, I want to be silent. I want all the noise of the crowd, the complaining of Pharisees, the braying of a donkey, the rustle of clothes falling on a dusty road, the whisper of a gentle breeze nudging olive branches to my right and the scratching annoyance of the person leaning into me on my left to stop. How we would freeze frame it all today if only we could!

But we can’t stop it, our Lord goes on… the crowd keeps shouting, the detractors continue their protest, and all of us who read and watch, see and hear every bit of what happens and are powerless to stop it. If we tried to silence the noise, …if we were successful, our Lord tells us the rocks would cry out! Even inanimate creation praises this One who
goes before us… for he is worthy even as he makes his way to a splintered cross …. And there he will hang and die for us and every human being who has or will ever live.

The force of this idea is very much present in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians. There, probably quoting a beloved first century hymn that Christians sang in worship, Paul captures the entire sweep of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ. The hymn confesses that this One who was “in the form of God” descended to the depths of our human experience, taking the form of servant, humbling himself even to the point of death. But with great power and love, God raised Jesus from death’s grip, exalted him, and gave to him “the Name above every name. That at the Name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”

Capturing this sweeping story of salvation in verse, Paul is telling the Philippians that our Lord’s life, death, and resurrection not only
effects our salvation, but *is cosmic in nature*, summoning all creation to acknowledge the Lord by whose power and love all that is made came into being and in whose power and love all creation will have its ultimate destiny. **And even if we were silent**, the rocks would cry out!

These scriptures need a hearing today, but time limits us and, frankly, our minds can only hold so much wonder in a single moment. Isn’t **one gift the text gives** us a *wake-up call* telling us who Jesus is and what he accomplished for us and our salvation. We gather to today as inhabitants of a planet that is torn by violence and war, wounded by misunderstanding and abuse, and threatened by the madness of the few who would have us think murder of the innocent is God’s will.

If we were to say **nothing of these atrocities**, if our voices somehow were mute before injustice and pain, or if we were to turn away as if to suggest not seeing all the ugliness will make it go away, the rocks would cry out. The rocks would cry out because even if we are blindly ignorant to God’s work and God’s presence in our world, the
rocks know as do all things in heaven and earth fashioned by the hand of eternal power. The Psalmist said it best: “The heavens are telling the glory of God and the firmament his power.”

Yes, Palm Sunday, is a day when rocks would shout even if we were silent, today is a moment to remember that with God’s presence and in God’s loving embrace, nothing can ultimately keep us from God’s love and grace.

Read words of hymn…..

What will you sing today and into this holy week that must be sung? When you find those words or that tune, words full of grace and brimming with love, sing them. Sing the song of unimagined love as you witness the One who loves you and will never let you go make his way to the cross. He gives his life for you and every person who has or will ever live. Even if you are silent, the rocks will cry out! Those
rocks, indeed all creation, **will not be silent nor can we**. Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, now and forever.