

Marjory Zoet Bankson: The Stones Would Shout

Palm Sunday (April 8, 2001)

Sermon for Seekers Church

By Marjory Zoet Bankson

The Stones Would Shout

Text: Luke 19:28-40

...Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday. It marks Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the beginning of Holy Week – the beginning of the end!

We know the story. We celebrate it every year: the last Passover meal together in the upper room on Maundy Thursday; the wrenching experience of Jesus' Crucifixion on Good Friday; and the celebration of the Risen Christ on Easter Sunday. We celebrate the end of life, as they knew it with Jesus...and hope for a different reality ahead.

We hardly stop to think why the people were so glad to see Jesus enter Jerusalem, why they screamed and yelled his praise. "Oh yes," we say, "they thought he'd come to liberate

them from the Romans." Is that what we think? Do we think that this itinerant preacher on a colt could catalyze rebellion strong enough to overthrow the Roman State? Is that what the Pharisees were afraid? *"Teacher, order your disciples to stop."* He answered, *"I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."*

I think the Pharisees were wedded to the mental framework of domination and oppression...and knew that Jesus and his rag-tag followers could not win.

Why then did Jesus speak of stones? Was it just a figure of speech? On the other hand, was he reminding people that God is known in all of creation and not just by human beings?

On this Palm Sunday, year 2001, it is time to recover the link that Jesus lived between human experience and earth as a seamless web of God's good creation. Not as just "another mission" to be concerned about, but a new understanding of what it means to be followers of Jesus, midwives for God's realm "on earth as it is in heaven."

The Hebraic understanding of God did not set history against nature, but celebrated God as Lord of heaven and earth. Psalm 29 speaks of God present in the storm, whose "voice thunders over many waters." In Psalm 65, God visits the earth as rain and the meadows shout and sing for joy. To Job, God says "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth, when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?"

Hebrew thought wove the concept of justice with fruitfulness of the land most clearly in the sabbatical laws which set aside the seventh day, the seventh year and culminated in the "Year of the Lord" or Jubilee, when debts were forgiven, land was returned and slaves released (Lev 25). Whether or not Israel ever fully practiced Jubilee justice is not the point. It is the interrelationship of all creation in Hebrew thought.

When Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming "the Year of the Lord," he put on the mantle of Jubilee and called his listeners to practice Jubilee by being "good news" to the poor and healers for the hurts of the world. His mission was to restore and redeem the outcast, the marginalized parts of creation. He could not be "good news to the poor" without including the land and water as a whole system. That is the message of Jubilee that we find in Leviticus 25! That is why the people greeted Jesus with jubilation as he entered Jerusalem, some 2,000 years ago.

In her wonderful book, *Gaia & God*, Rosemary Ruether reminds us that the Jubilee vision does not promise a once-and-for-all destruction of evil. It is not an apocalyptic vision of final judgment. That strand of our biblical tradition has been well developed and entrenched in what Walter Breuggemann calls "the domination system." The Jubilee tradition is a redemptive and corrective process for the ways we get unbalanced, both personally and societally.

The domination tradition can trace its roots back to the Garden of Eden story, where humans are told to subdue the earth, but the Jubilee tradition calls us to stewardship of all creation...

Jesus' life and ministry is grounded in this Jubilee vision:
If these disciples were silent, the very stones would shout!

And today, the stones are shouting! Trees and rivers, birds and fish are shouting their cry of rage and pain! Do we have ears to hear? On the other hand, will we wave our palms in some silly reenactment of a bygone day and let them cry in vain?

We are not the first to forget the Sabbath link between rest and reverence for the land. We are not the first humans to deplete the land and devastate the forests. Psalms about the "cedars of Lebanon" remind us of the magnificent forests that are gone forever because our ancestors did not curb their appetites for wood until it was gone, seed, soil and climate change.

Always before, human populations were small enough to move elsewhere and let the earth restore itself. It lulled us into sleep, forgetting the part of our religious tradition that calls us to stewardship of the earth as a complete life-sustaining system. Sabbath rest was not just meant for man. It was to be a reminder of our place in God's larger realm.

Now we know there is no place to go. The atom bomb was a call to WAKE UP! To know there are no boundaries on the wind and waves which take pollution everywhere even as the very stones seal toxic waste in place. There is no place to go while God restores what we ourselves have crucified. *"If these disciples were silent," Jesus said, "the very stones would shout!"*

Palm Sunday points to the Jubilee vision as an earth-based ethos which threads through our faith tradition from the first.

Will we have ears to hear?

[This sermon served as an introduction to a sacred dance performance which followed it]