

## **Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion**

March 20, 2016

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Decorah, Iowa

Rev. Amy Larson

This Lent we've been reflecting upon how our senses can help us return to God. Today, I encourage you to pay attention to your sense of hearing as we immerse ourselves in the story of Jesus' passion from the Gospel of Luke. Notice the sounds and voices and we will reflect upon them in a brief reflection after the Gospel reading. You can remain seated for the Gospel Acclamation and the reading of the Gospel.

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

This Sunday is full of lots of loud voices and lots of contrasts.

We begin by yelling "Hosanna in the Highest!" and singing out "All Glory Laud and Honor". We hear how the whole multitude of disciples "praised God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen". They, like we, had such high hopes that God was going to bring peace and change in Jesus. And then, all of sudden, we find ourselves right in the middle of voices full of anger, violence, sorrow and death?

Suddenly, we're hearing about how the whole assembly of leaders of the people vehemently accused Jesus before Pilate. They shouted that Pilate should do away with Jesus and release a murderer instead. Their voices grew to a fevered pitch until all together they shouted "crucify him, crucify him." And the crowd "Kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that Jesus be crucified *and their voices prevailed.*"

As we continue on we hear about women "beating their breasts and wailing for Jesus, leaders scoffing at him, soldiers mocking him, and a condemned criminal deriding him. And then Jesus, the one who was to bring peace and change, cried out with a loud voice, 'Father into your hands I commend my spirit', and died." Suddenly all worship and celebration seem awfully far away and awfully irrelevant to what's in front of us. The voices of praise and hope are drowned out by the voices of death.

And though the contrast is especially stark today, the contrasts of Palm/Passion Sunday aren't all that different from what we encounter every Sunday. We gather to worship and praise, we rejoice and sing out our hopes for God to do a new thing in our world. We pray for peace. And then we walk out of those doors and we're surrounded by voices full of anger, violence, sorrow and death.

We get back home and our bickering starts up again. We pick up the phone and hear the voice of yet another loved one who's been diagnosed with cancer. We check the news and hear about protests and demonstrations, people who are angry with the way things are and want change, people who have been oppressed for far too long crying out for justice and peace. We've had high hopes for many of these protests, especially those we once called the Arab Spring, but now five years after protests began in Syria things keep deteriorating. Is there any hope for change, any reason to praise, any reason to expect God to do a new thing?

As we leave here each Sunday and face all these other sounds, it doesn't take long for the joyful gathering, the praising and singing to feel awfully far away and awfully irrelevant to what faces us. The voices of hope and praise are drowned out, overpowered, even silenced by voices full of sorrow, anger, despair and death. Or are they? When Jesus was told to silence his disciple's praises he answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." Jesus said that the voices of hope and praise cannot be silenced,

cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. Jesus said that life and peace will have the last word. And yet, when Jesus was on trial, the crowd "Kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that Jesus should be crucified and their voices prevailed."

Which voices will prevail in our world, in our lives? Are our gatherings of praise and worship insignificant and irrelevant? Do we sing a word of false hope that will always be overpowered by the sounds of death? Which voices will prevail? This week, this week we call Holy, we will hear all the ways that the powers of death try to defeat the power of life, try to silence our hope. Sometimes in this week, as in life, things get deafeningly loud. Sometimes things get painfully silent. At one point this week it will seem that death has prevailed and the silence will be terrible. The silence will proclaim the death of the Voice - the Word of life.

But in the end, Jesus' words will ring out "I tell you if these were silent, the stones would shout out." In the end, a stone will tell of life - a stone that has been rolled away from an empty tomb to release again the Voice, the Word of life.

This voice is loose and at work in our world, telling a new story, singing a new song of peace and life. This voice was at work this past Monday in the midst of thousands of angry voices. Donald Trump spoke at one of the colleges of the ELCA, Lenoir Rhyne, a sister school to Luther College. The ELCA Bishop for that synod, Timothy Marcus Smith, called for a demonstration of the love and peace of Christ in the midst of what was sure to be a volatile situation between Trump supporters and those who oppose Trump. About 100 clergy and 100 other Lutherans, including faculty and students who were on campus for spring break, came to demonstrate.

Trump got delayed because of fog so the Lutherans had about four hours before his talk to engage with thousands of people who were waiting for him. Bishop Smith reports: "The Lutherans sang hymns constantly and at one point when one group of protesters and a pod of Trump supporters started screaming, shouting obscenities, making obscene gestures, and finally rushing toward each other, spontaneously the Lutherans linked arms and got between the screaming groups and sang "Jesus Loves Me ..." and a second verse, "Jesus Loves You." It was a sight to behold. Clearly, our presence, at least in that moment, kept things civil ... I was extremely moved by the number of people who came and how they provided a peaceful, calming witness to the love of Jesus to and for all."

These Lutherans could provide a witness to the love of Jesus because they had trained their voices in the language of hope and praise in worship. They could face voices full of anger and even violence, trusting that life will have the final word, trusting that the voice of peace will ultimately prevail.

May worship and this Holy Week do the same for all of us.