

Karen Hollis  
Palm Sunday  
Luke 19:28-40  
These Stones

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Um  
About 90 million years ago Vancouver Island was moving in from the Pacific, colliding with North America, creating the Nanaimo Basin and soon the islands within it. When you walk on the sandstone on Gabriola, you can sense the ancient quality of the stone that was created so long ago. What stories does this stone carry? Of sedimentation and ice ages? Of growing trees and greenery; of sea lions and whales; eagles and deer. Of seasonal residents who carve their faith and culture into them; of logging and building; somehow the stones speak of this history . . .

To those sensitive to the stories of stones, they also speak an ancient voice of creation: whether it is the vast stretches of stone on the shores of Drumbeg, the exposed stone behind the church, the boulders on the hill of Sandwell or pebbles on the beach below, these stones share the voice of creation. Creation is the voice of truth and justice . . . in unity with Christ, through whom all things came into being.

In his own words, Jesus affirms this connection. As he approaches Jerusalem, his disciples are criticized for praising him . . . they cry out “blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Jesus affirms that the truth of this moment will be expressed; “if [the disciples] were silent, the stones would shout out.” Because creation will not be silenced . . .

Whether in their natural locations or harvested for human use, elements of creation always speak . . . they speak an authentic voice of truth. When choosing stones for building, builders look for them to speak in a different way, through size and shape. The builders might chip at them to make them fit well in a particular place and scrutinize them to find that all-important cornerstone . . . the cornerstone is

comparatively much larger than the other stones, and is set at the corner of the building. It is the measuring point for the entire structure and must be able to withstand the weight of the building pressing in on it from different sides. Builders use their wisdom, training and experience to choose a cornerstone that will be just right for a structure – it's the most important decision of the building process.

But what happens when God does a new thing? Human wisdom is not equal to God's wisdom; what we might reject because it looks too weak and unworthy, may be just what God has in mind!<sup>1</sup>

For the crowd and disciples watching Jesus come up that enormous hill to Jerusalem, he is a sure thing: teacher, healer, they associate with him a revolution, toppling earthly power and transforming their lives. Jesus makes his dramatic entry into the city, after which he turns over the tables of the money changers in the Temple, and he doesn't give easy answers when people test him in conversation. He doesn't topple those Romans on the city on the hill, in fact, he confounds us after we cheer his arrival . . . we thought he was going to transform our lives . . . but as he exposes himself and submits to violence and death, our joy quickly becomes disappointment, devastation and anger. Jesus says from the cross, "Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do."

It's safe to say that in general humans are more comfortable with strength than weakness. We see survival of the fittest before our eyes like those vegetable starts we prepare for the garden . . . the heartiest ones are most likely to yield a good crop, not that puny one that came up bent over with half a leaf missing. How are we to respond to God's upside down ways? We can use our devastation and anger to try and hurt God, or we can present them as an offering to God.

As Jesus walks through Holy Week, he knows he will be cast aside and echoes Psalm 118, "the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing and it is amazing in our eyes." Even before his crucifixion, Jesus proclaims his place in the kingdom of God and invites those who are listening to meet him there.

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<sup>1</sup> Feasting on the Word, year C vol 2 p. 150

Jesus leaves it to each of us to decide on what we will build our lives and what we will build with our lives. To build on the way of Christ is an invitation into vulnerability, humility, weakness . . . these are not our favourite things . . . they don't seem as stable as those stone buildings on the hill . . . there's a part of us that wishes God would ask something else. We wish Jesus had a different path; we wish God affirmed the way of strength because that would be easier . . . but strength isn't open for transformation. We know that strength doesn't show us the inner workings of our hearts. And we know it is in bearing ourselves to God we come to know our true selves and even more, our identity in Christ. Like the tides that cover and expose the stone around our island home, we ebb and flow in our closeness with God. It seems no matter how many times we come before God, at least part of ourselves is still resistant, still enjoys a comfortable distance.

Walter Brueggemann who writes extensively on the human condition and relationship with God, puts it this way:

We arrange our lives as best we can,  
to keep your holiness at bay,  
with our pieties; our doctrines; our liturgies; our moralities; our secret ideologies,  
Safe, virtuous, settled.

And then you –

You and your dreams, You and your visions,  
You and your purposes, You and your commands, You and our neighbours.  
We find your holiness not at bay, but probing, pervading, insisting, demanding.

And we yield, sometimes gladly,

Sometimes resentfully,

Sometimes late . . . or soon.

We yield because you, beyond us, are our God.

We are your creatures met by your holiness,

by your holiness made our true selves.

And we yield.

As we walk through this week, God give us the grace and courage to bear ourselves like exposed stone before your love, to come before you again and again, and offer our lives as you offer yours to build up your kingdom. Amen.