

May I speak in the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please be seated. This service, it falls to be just to mark the transition from the joy of the procession to the solemn reading of our passion narrative. And I just want to say a few words about a theme that I've never noticed in the Easter stories before that's come to my attention as I looked at the text this week, which was the importance that stones play in the Easter narrative. They come up several times. In fact, several times I'll be preaching this Holy Week, stones will have a place of significance. We read in the story we've just heard today in the gospel that we read outside about the first Palm Sunday, that stones appear. It can seem a bit odd, the reference. Jesus says, "If the crowds were silent, these stones would shout out."

Now to understand what he means by that, we need to know something of the context in which he was speaking. Jesus has ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey and he's been met by an enthusiastic crowd waving palms and shouting "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord." And that quote is a quote from Psalm 118. We'll be saying it later in our communion this morning. So, the crowds were using a phrase that they were familiar with to greet Jesus as he comes into Jerusalem. But the religious leaders, the Pharisees don't like the sound of this. And they say to Jesus, "Shut up the crowd. Make them be quiet." And it's in response to this request that Jesus says if they were silent, the stones would shout out. Now, I realize that even knowing the context still makes this a difficult and rather enigmatic saying.

To understand it more fully, we need to go back to Psalm 118 again and look at that. It's a great psalm and it's a psalm which has this refrain that comes several times throughout that psalm. It says, "Oh, give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his steadfast love endures forever." And that's a refrain. The steadfast love endures forever, a refrain that runs throughout that psalm, indeed, throughout the whole of history. Throughout all of time, creation rings out with a song of praise to God the Creator.

Some of us have seen that in the psalms of praise that we've been looking at in this season of Lent.

One thing that is common to all those psalms is that it's not just humanity that praises God, the whole of creation joins in praise of the creator. Psalm 19 begins, "The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of his hands." Psalm 96: "Let the heavens rejoice. Let the earth be glad. Let the sea resound. Let the fields be jubilant. Let all the trees of the forest sing for joy."

The crowd on that first Palm Sunday, were joining with creation's ongoing psalm of praise. Creation sings a song that can never be drowned out. The Pharisees might think that stopping the crowd praising might stop the praise of Jesus, but even if they did manage that, creation's praise would carry on. The stones would cry out. The heavens declare the glory of God. They sing with the psalmist, "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. His love endures forever."

There will always be a way for this song to be heard. The song of God's love goes on. As we enter this Holy Week, we see how the forces of evil try to silence Jesus, but even death couldn't silence him and the praises of him. God's love will be heard. The song of God's steadfast love goes on. Even in this darkest week, God finds a way to let his song of love be heard.

We'll sing a hymn later in this service, a beautiful hymn that is new to us, which has these words, "But now at the ending, the low is lifted high. The stars shall bend their voices and every stone shall cry, and every stone shall cry in praise of the child by whose descent among us the worlds are reconciled." Even amidst the noise and clamor of the crucifixion and the piercing sound of the nails being banged into Jesus's hands, let God's love be heard. The stones will cry out, let God's love be heard. Amen.