

April 14, 2019 -- Palm Sunday  
Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster  
Susan Gascho-Cooke  
Luke 19:28-40  
“When You Need to Cry Out: Parades, Hot Sauce & Onions”

In today’s scripture -- Luke’s telling of Jesus’ triumphal entry, I found myself once again up against a story I don’t really like. I love the clever counter-cultural empire-protest of it -- that Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey on one side of town, while the troops of the Roman empire are entering Jerusalem in armor on war horses on the other side of town. The triumphal entry, as depicted, fulfils Old Testament prophecy, and shows an alternative to what being a king could look like. Kingdom of God vs. Empire

It’s the spectacle of the triumphal entry that puzzles me ... The Jesus that makes sense to me is the one who teaches by conversation, wherever he happens to be; the one who heals somewhat reluctantly, and often asks that no one spread the news about it; the one who speaks in parables, not in rhetorical masterpieces designed to manipulate emotion or in easy answers to be mindlessly mimicked.

So, for Jesus to participate in what feels like a lot of spectacle seems out of character, and it makes me suspicious. And yet ... I’m intrigued by Jesus’ response to the Pharisees in this story. The Pharisees who seem to be looking in on the procession with the same attitude that I have: *C’mon, Jesus! This is embarrassing, make your disciples to stop!!*

We don’t know exactly why this process gets their goat. Perhaps it felt dangerous to them. After all, Jesus calling this kind of attention to himself with behavior that was, at best, poking fun at Rome, and at worst, outright challenging it. They could legitimately worry that they might be seen as party to Jesus’ actions, and vulnerable to meeting a similar fate. Perhaps they were trying to be the Quiet in the Land, and not be noticed by the Roman occupiers? If this was their concern, they were right. This *was* dangerous behavior.

What I found myself returning to in the text, though, was Jesus’ response: “If they were silent, even the stones would cry out.” What the crowd (the “multitude of disciples”) was actually doing was shouting was “Hosanna” and calling Jesus “king.” If you look closely at the words Jesus uses, “to cry out,” it doesn’t sound like what the crowd was doing at all. The Koiné Greek verb, *krazo*, is used throughout the Gospels: when someone “cries out” to get Jesus’ attention. When someone need healing for themselves or a loved one they “cry out,” “Have mercy!” or they “cry out” “in fear.” People who are described as being “possessed of unclean spirits” “cry out.” Tellingly, Jesus “cries out” on the cross, in Matthew’s Gospel, right before he “gives up his spirit” and dies.

So, I hear Jesus saying that what lies underneath the pageantry, the hilarity, the loud demonstration, is actually profound grief and fear, pent up so tightly that it was about to explode. And a profound need to voice and reach out and touch hope. The connection that he makes between pent-up human grief and its expression in creation, is also profound. Looking around at creation now, it’s not hard to see it as the stones (and trees and creatures) crying out while we watch in stupefied silence.

I’ve been thinking this Lent, though, that the converse of this statement might also be true, between stones/creation and our own grief.

I'm going to share two stories with you about inanimate created things helping us to cry out. One is a very old story, the other a very new one.

New story first: I stumbled on a show on Youtube this winter, called Hot Ones. It's a talk show with celebrity guests, in which the host and guest sit across from each other, and while the interview is going on, they each eat 10 chicken wings that have been tossed in sequentially hotter and hotter sauces. They start with Sriracha and end with sauces in the 1-2 million Scoville range. All the while the host, who is also powering through hot wings, is asking normal questions of his guest. By the time they hit the last wings in the line, they are having trouble concentrating and even talking, sometimes. They're chugging milk, and sweating, and panting, and (full disclosure) sometimes cussing, too.

There's a marked transformation through the gauntlet of hot wings. Most celebrities are there to talk about their careers, and promote their newest project. They do this all the time, and you can see the banter and facade, but by about wing #7, the person sitting there is *very* human. There's just not that much "cool" you exude when you're trying not to drool and your foundation is melting. It might seem like a cruel device -- and certainly it does look painful, but everybody's there because they've agreed to the challenge, and everyone has the option to tap out at any time.

And while they usually profess playful anger toward the host when they're coming to the end of the line, they are also visibly so much more present, and having so much more fun. I have to wonder whether there's some relief for people have to carefully curate themselves all the time, to being put in a circumstance where all that drops away,

I think it would be interesting to be quizzed on one's theology through such a gauntlet of hot sauce, or to be asked the truth about our lives. What truths would fall out of our mouths, about how we *really* perceive ourselves and God and the world? What facades might we let down? Honestly, I think we'd be more surprised by the faith we *have*, than by the faith we may be worried we don't have.

Hot sauce helps us cry out. And I think we crave and urgently *need* the invitation to cry out.

The second story is an old one ... a fairy tale, really. A king and queen (why do they always have to be royalty??) have a daughter, a princess, and though she is well-loved, the princess has been cursed, so she cannot cry, no matter how she feels.

Doctors are called in, and magicians, and wise people to cure her and induce her to cry. The one rule is that they're not allowed to hurt her. But nothing they try produces a tear. So, the king puts out an invitation all across the land for *anyone* to come and try to get his daughter to cry (without hurting her). Nothing worked.

And the princess was miserable, too. It's not that she felt joyful all the time, she just couldn't cry. Finally, a little farmer girl comes to the castle, saying: I think I can make the princess cry.

So they let her in.

She doesn't say much, but she invites the princess to come with with her at a table. Out she pulls a cutting board, two knives, and a bag of onions. She hands a knife and an onion to the princess, and says, "Cut these onions with me?" Sure enough, not much time needs to pass before the knives are opening up those onions, and before she knew it the princess was tearing, then crying, then sobbing.

In come the king and queen, and everyone's laughing and crying now. The two girls remain friends, and the princess lives happily ever after, *and* sadly ever after, and madly, and however she felt.

One of the things that the life of Jesus -- the incarnation of Christ -- reminds us is that even God sought out embodiedness. Even God knew that connecting with us would be profoundly different skin to skin. Many of us live in such a way that we assume that the only way we learn things is through our brains. In Lent and in Holy Week we are invited to look at hard things, to sit with them, to be reminded that Jesus' teachings affected his very *body*, even as faithful living impacts our embodied living

I invite you, as you are able, to see the practices of Lent and Holy Week as the sage advice of an ancient ancestral mother, showing up at your door with a bag of onions, pretending that the onions are what need cutting. Say yes! Even if you suspect she has ulterior motives. She does. And they might save you.

Or you might view the remembrances and provocations of Holy Week as an invitation to discuss the life of Jesus, or to look, *really* look at suffering in ways you might usually avoid, while sampling a succession of hot sauces beyond your palate.

We invite seasons of somberness, of looking at the hard stories of Jesus, particularly his death, in part because these practices can help us get in touch with the parts of ourselves that don't often see the light of day.

So, this week, this *holy* week ahead, walks us through Christ's *passion* -- do you hear that? Passion and holiness, together.

So go forth from here! Laugh, cry out, shake your fists at the sky!

Shout your gratitudes and praise to God!

Wave a palm, or your scarf, or your freak flag!

Eat well, sleep long, make art, make love!

Reach out to support someone in hardship!

Schedule that appointment you're avoiding!

Turn your favorite song up to 11!

Drive with the windows down, let your toes touch the grass!

Open the "good" bottle of wine *now*!

Sweep out some cobwebs!

Bring your empty bellies and dirty feet to Maundy Thursday!

Come to Good Friday even though the story is really hard.

Try to stay with Jesus through it.

Pray, *really pray* (whether it's in word-form or silence-form or casserole-form) for someone you suspect needs it.

And if all of that seems too distant to access, break out the hot sauce, and try talking about it. And if someone you know seems to be holding emotions in so tight that the stones are about to cry out, show up with a bag of onions.