

Title: The Voice of Love
Date: February 14, 2021
Subject: Walking with Jesus Christ to the cross, empty tomb and beyond: Sunday and Monday
Scripture: John 12:

The road was packed. Young and old. Families. It was one gigantic moving picnic. Excitement filled the air. And why not? They were just a few miles from Jerusalem where they'd celebrate the Passover. The anticipation reached fever pitch as they heard Jesus was nearby. Then he appeared, riding on a donkey's colt.

It was almost too much. Some had witnessed him raise Lazarus from the dead. Others had heard about it from someone who'd been there, or from someone who knew someone who'd been there, or from someone who knew someone who knew someone who'd been there. Word got around.

Now the one they hoped was the Messiah, who would lead them out of Rome's oppression and into a restored Jewish nation, was right there with them. They raised their voices, "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming Kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" The words from the Psalms, part of their worship of God, were infused with new meaning.

Others, some of the religious leaders and the Pharisees, raised their voices, expressing their displeasure. They cautioned Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

We might have said in response to them, "Tough bagels. If you don't like it, lump it."

Jesus was more diplomatic. "I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40).

That's an extremely provoking image. After all, stones are inanimate objects. They don't have mouths. They don't have any way to make noise except when thrown against the wall or rolling in an avalanche. How are we to understand Jesus' meaning? Some think he was referring to the stones of the temple that in the future would make noise as the Romans destroyed it. Others feel he meant God will change people's stony hearts so they can praise him. Others think it's a proverb not to be taken literally.

I think Jesus was talking about literal stones. They'd miraculously be given voices to speak intelligible praises to God to reveal his true identity.

Usually, Jesus didn't want his real identity to be revealed. When people sought to make him King by force, he slipped away (John 6:15). When he healed the deaf and mute man, he warned people to not tell who he was (Mark 7:36). When Peter confessed Jesus as the Christ, Jesus warned them not to tell (Mark 8: 27 – 30). When Jesus was glorified in front of Peter, James and John, he gave strict orders to not tell anyone until he'd risen from the dead (Mark 9:9). The same was true for demonic forces. When they cried out about him being the Messiah, Jesus told them to shush.

Jesus responded differently the day of his entry. He gladly accepted the pronouncements and praises identifying him as the Christ. He wanted people to proclaim the truth, even though they don't fully realize the importance of what they're saying. His time had come.

News of Jesus coming quickly spread. The crowd swelled as folks from town ran out to meet him. The news also made it to the higher echelons of the religious community. They were perturbed by the commotion. They concluded: “See this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!” (John 12:19). Their resentment toward Jesus would continue to grow and become increasingly evident.

After Jesus enters the city he goes to the temple. He attracts another crowd - the blind being led by the hand because they can't see, the lame being carried because they can't walk. He heals them (Matthew 21:14). And children are shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Matthew 21:15).

Here's what children in the temple may have sounded like.

*** video of Chloe and Sophie singing

That was our two oldest granddaughters Chloe and Sophie. In case you missed the words because of their volume and intensity, the song was “What beautiful name it is...you have no rival, you have no equal.”

Whenever we see Sophie, she wants to look at pictures on my phone. She really wants to get to this video which is over 2 minutes long. Sometimes she says it's too loud and has to turn down the volume. She knows she's loud. We think she's adorable and marvel that they know the words.

The chief priests and teachers of the law didn't think it was so adorable or marvel at the children in the temple, singing and shouting. They'd also witnessed miraculous healings... They were indignant. They told Jesus so. “Do you hear what these children are saying?” They wanted to shoot the message and the Messenger.

I think Jesus acted calmly and coolly when he responded, “Yes. Have you never read, *From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise?*” That's a mic drop moment. Enough said. He quoted scripture to them and asked with mock astonishment “Haven't you guys ever read this?” The passage is from one of the best-known Psalms (Psalm 8:1, 2). Jesus was challenging their spiritual IQ. They got the message.

I think Jesus thought the kids were adorable and delightfully accepted their praise. He had an affinity for kids. He used a little child to illustrate the kingdom value of being a servant. He had the child stand in the middle of adults. This was unusual because children were often excluded to the fringes and treated like property. Jesus took the child in his arms proclaiming, “Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:33-37).

When people brought little children to have Jesus touch them, the disciples were the roadblocks. “Jesus became indignant and said to his disciples, *Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs as such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.* And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them” (Mark 10:13 – 16).

When triumphal entry Sunday was over, Jesus retired to the village of Bethany, likely to the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus to spend the night.

Monday morning dawns bright and clear. Well, we don't know if it was bright and clear. But we do find Jesus making his way back into the city early in the morning.

Read Mark 11:15 - 18.

Jesus had previously cleared the temple at the beginning of his ministry. This time it was within days of his death. He was again distraught over what he found. The place to worship God had become a place to take advantage of those who came to worship. Exorbitant prices were charged to obtain sacrifices and get the proper money to be used as an offering. Money changers and merchants ruled the day.

The passage made a quick note about Jesus teaching. Another account tells us he taught every day of his last week. The crowds were amazed at his teaching. They hung on his words (Luke 19:48).

Not so much the religious hierarchy, those who were well schooled in the things of God and should have known the essentials of what God had in mind. The only thing they were interested in hanging was Jesus. They used their voices to look for ways to kill him. They were motivated by fear of who Jesus was, what he said, what he stood for, what he taught.

Just like these religious leaders, there are forces in our world that want us to shut up. Jean is reading two books analyzing the current situation and what the future may hold. The first chapter of one is entitled "Religion must die." A little indication of an attitude that is becoming more prevailing.

Franklin Graham writes in a recent *Decision* magazine (January 2021, pp. 6, 7), "I fully expect religious liberty to be fiercely attacked by the strident voices from the radical, progressive left who have embraced socialist ideologies to run America." He mentions the Equality Act which would mandate Christian schools, ministries and churches to hire people who have unbiblical lifestyles that are in opposition to what these organizations believe. He further states, "In that climate, it won't be long until churches and preachers are forbidden to confront and rebuke sin. They will call it *hate speech*. If we call someone to repentance, we could be accused of intolerance. That would cut the heart right out of the gospel." He quotes Scripture: "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)." He gives this exhortation, "Whatever direction the winds of culture or government blow, believers are exhorted to stand firm in their faith, without the slightest compromise." After using Daniel as an example of remaining true to God against overwhelming odds, he declares the path forward for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association: "We will continue to preach the good news of Christ's death, burial and resurrection" and connects it with this verse: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17)."

There was another group in the temple. They were Greeks, non-Jews. They likely were attracted to Judaism's ideas of worshipping one God and its high moral standards, but didn't convert to it. They had limited access in the temple area. They were witnesses of the people being taught by Jesus but didn't have access to him. They contacted the disciple Phillip with a request, "Sir we would like to see Jesus" (John 12:21).

Some think they were merely curious about this man and teaching. I think they were earnest seekers. They're more in the line of Zaccheus who climbed a tree or Nicodemus who came to Jesus at night or the four men who tore apart a roof so they could lower their friend into the presence of Jesus to be healed. One man said of the Greeks: "These men from the west represent, at the end of Christ's life, what the wise men from the east represented at its beginning; but these come to the cross of the King, even as those to His manger" [Stier].

We don't have the record of a direct conversation of Jesus with the Greeks. It seems like their request was granted and they were included in the biblical record as part of the group to whom Jesus was speaking.

Read John 12 23, 24, 32, 33.

Jesus states that all people, including the Greeks, will be able to see him as the time had come for him to be glorified. Minds would start racing towards him being elevated in position. That eventually would come for Jesus but there was something needed to happen first. Being glorified had a deeper meaning.

Jesus reinterpreted the meaning of life and death using an agricultural illustration. A kernel of wheat by itself might be nice to look at. It might even have a little crunch to it. Not very filling. It's only one. However, plant it in the ground and it reproduces 20, 50, 100 seeds. If those seeds go back in the ground, the multiplication process keeps going and going and going. Jesus is the kernel of wheat that needs to fall into the ground and die so he could produce many seeds who would live.

This leads to v. 32 where Jesus refers to his death on a cross. When he was lifted up, he would draw all people to himself. The cross has a voice. It's like a magnetic force. The cross will draw people, not repel them. All people have to come to the cross -- some to be judged as stated in the prior verses, some to gain life.

The cross as used by the Romans to execute criminals was meant as a device to discourage and instill fear. Jesus said the cross would now be transformed to become a source of encouragement and courage for both the martyr and the disciple in his daily approach to life. It would become a symbol of love, not hate.

In between Jesus' teaching about his time coming and the cross, the voice of God the Father chimed in (vv. 28, 29). He couldn't hold back. He verified Jesus as the Son of God and validated his purpose in coming. He has glorified and will glorify himself. The crowd thought God's voice was that of an angel or thunder.

Jesus likens himself to light in vv. 35, 36, 44 - 46. Jesus said he'd be on earth for only a little longer. They needed to come over to the light before they were overtaken by darkness. He promised that all who come to him will become children of the light. They need to believe in him, put their complete trust in him, not just as a person who was a good teacher and did good things, but as the one who could bring them into a right relationship with God. He is the light that has come into the world so people won't have to stay in darkness.

Most people don't like darkness. It can be unnerving and scary. In the days before Mercury vapor yard lights, our farm had only an incandescent bulb up on the light pole. During winter it was dark before milking and chores were done. The good news is we had a switch in the barn so we could turn on the yard light. Often the house lights weren't on yet. It seems it frequently happened where two of the three of us brothers started up to the house while the third would stay behind, thinking he'd have a little bit of fun. He'd wait for the opportune moment, till the unsuspecting brothers were part way up to the house, and then turn the yard light off, plunging them into darkness.

The darkness we experienced is nothing compared to the darkness Jesus was talking about. There would be some spiritual darkness while people were alive but ultimately, they'd be plunged into eternal darkness.

How did the people respond to Jesus? Read v. 37.

They wouldn't believe in Jesus as they couldn't believe in Jesus. This was foretold by Isaiah who lifted his voice to prophesy against the people. They were blind and deadened in their hearts. They thought once the Son of man appeared, he would live forever. Nothing in their thinking about him needing to die first.

The lack of belief seems incredulous in view of the miraculous signs Jesus performed as well as the words of those who greeted him on the triumphal entry. Seems like the people who saw and heard should be firm in their convictions and never turn their back on him. Some say it's different groups as the triumphal entry crowd left Jerusalem but that's unlikely because they came for the Passover. Maybe the crowd had merely a shallow sentimentality of belief or an intellectual acceptance but not true trust. Maybe they changed because he wasn't matching their expectations.

There was some good news, at least quasi good news. A significant group of religious leaders put their trust and confidence in Jesus Christ. They did it with some reservations. They were secret saints which ain't much better than the ain'ts. They're probably even less comfortable. They loved praise from men more than praise from God. They were afraid they'd be excommunicated from the synagogue.

It's been proposed that Jesus spoke as he did to cull the herd. "He struck for decisions of the heart. Thus, as the great crowd still followed him, Jesus sought to call out the counterfeits from among the faithful. Stringency and sacrifice were his watchwords, and he emphasized that following him involved also forsaking the things of the world. *Thus, therefore, whoever of you does not leave all that he has cannot be my disciple.* He stressed the impossibility of serving God and mammon or worldly gain. Speaking of his own cross, he also spoke of the disciples' cross. As he was to die *for* sin, they also were *to* die to sin and self. The cross was to precede the glory" (The Life of Christ in Stereo, Johnston Cheney and Stanley Ellisen, p. 145).

Which voice are we going to listen to? Which voice are we going to allow to order our lives? The voice of the religious leaders who had disdain and hatred for Jesus and marginalized people who didn't measure up to their status? The voice that's telling us it's better to stay quiet and not ruffle feathers or cause people to think we're a religious zealot or a simpleton? The voice that says we need to go along with the crowd and get involved in their activities because a little fun isn't gonna hurt anybody?

Or will we listen to the voice of Jesus who implores us to come to the light, come to his cross, and take up our cross daily and follow him? Use our voices to speak for him?

At youth group on Wednesday one of the students spoke up about what happened in English class. They were studying poems by one of the classical English poets. The student shared his insights of how the poem seemed to be speaking of biblical themes like Christ being the Lamb of God as well as Adam and Eve around "the cursed tree." The teacher expressed his appreciation and said he'd never heard those insights in his 27 years of teaching. The student took the opportunity to present the voice of Christ.

Jesus is the voice of love. May we listen for his voice and use ours to tell him we love him and tells others about him.