

I would be remiss if I didn't tell you from the outset that our New Testament reading from *Luke* is one of my favorites; particularly the last line. For *Luke* is the only one of the four gospel writers to include Jesus' remark that if the people were silent, then the very stones would shout aloud.

There is a saying from Ireland that if all the poets in Ireland were killed, the stones would give birth to new poets within one generation. Now maybe to some people that old saying speaks to the power of the land; but to me it more importantly speaks to the power of God. Yes, maybe I'm prejudiced toward the poetry of Irish poets of the Romantic period, but in any case, I surmise that the idea of Irish stones raising up Irish poets must have come from our New Testament passage.

Another reason I like *Luke's* telling of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday is the foolish idea by the Pharisees that God's people could be silenced. *Luke* will return to this impossibility in *Acts* when he quotes Gamaliel, a renowned rabbi, saying, "...if this...undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" Again, the sovereignty of God is made clear.

Several years ago I read a book by Mark Buchanan titled, *Your God Is Too Safe*. Buchanan tells a story about a conversation he had after conducting

Page 1

a funeral for a Christian woman he knew. Few of this woman's many children and grandchildren were Christian. Buchanan relates the story this way: "I thought I spoke the gospel clearly and boldly. Afterward, a woman came up to me. 'Thank you,' she said. 'That was so *nice* what you said, it really was *nice*. I'm religious, too. The family [meaning the deceased's family] always asks me to pray for the weather when we go golfing.'" Buchanan noted that this is how a lot of people see God nowadays – a

weather-worker. In Buchanan's words, "[A] Milquetoast-Pampering deity [who] is nothing but a cosmic lackey, an errand boy we call on to make our golf games pleasant, and then summarily dismiss. Worship him? Revere him? Die for him? Believe that he died a cruel and bloody death for us? You must be kidding."

Although Buchanan makes these remarks about people today, the truth is that that has been the attitude since before Jesus' ministry. People can't accept that God is really sovereign; that God is so powerful that we can only surmise less than 1/100th of who God is and what God can do – and yet, God is not as remote as we often think. Through Jesus Christ we can know this all-powerful God.

A former colleague of mine has doubts about this all-powerful God. He knows the Bible, perhaps better than I; so he's read about the miracles of healing, the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus, etc., and still he wants to limit God's powers, God's abilities. He looks at the people he knows who are sick or died from cancer, or who have died from unforeseen

Page 2

complications in surgery, or through the actions of a drunk driver. He looks at the unfairness of life that occasionally erupts, and he says – God can't be almighty; because if that was true, then there would be no disease, no dying, no heartache, no crying.

What this man wants is heaven on earth. Perhaps that is what many of us want, but folks, this is earth – not heaven. And, as beautiful and as wonderful as our life can sometimes be – we live in a mortal world where death and life come in their season – sometimes expected, sometimes not. But God is always there, even when we can't see, or hear, or taste, or touch Him.

It is to this faithful God that I sing, and pray, and worship. A God who is powerful enough to make even the stones shout is a God I want to know and adore. Not merely because such a God is so mighty, but because knowing and following such a God would be an adventure!

Our Old Testament passage this morning is known as the Third Servant

Song in Isaiah. This book of the Old Testament prophecy contains many songs. One, known as the *First Song of Isaiah* might be familiar to some of you. The chorus goes like this: *"Surely, it is God who saves me; I will trust in him and not be afraid. For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense, and he will be my Savior."*

While such words in this song are those attributed to God's deliverance,

Page 3

they also speak of God's sovereignty, of God's power to save. If you were in a position where you needed some help, who would you want on your side? "A Milquetoast-Pampering God," as Mark Buchanan described, or a God who helps us get through our adversities; who is by our side in good times and bad; who is powerful enough to create the universe and is compassionate to sustain us with a word?

Back to our New Testament text, knowing as we do about what happens to Jesus – the arrest, the flogging, the beating, and the inhumanity of the crucifixion, and I can imagine people saying, "Where was God then? Why didn't he send a host of angels to rescue Jesus?" How quickly we forget the very words of Jesus to Satan when Jesus was tempted as He began His ministry, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God... You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve..." And we know that Jesus asked God to remove the trials that he would undergo following his arrest. The prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done.

The perfect submission and obedience that Jesus demonstrated is held up as part of the answer God wants us to have. Especially today in our North American society we find it hard to imagine putting ourselves in such a vulnerable position. Our human response is limited and cannot "wrap our minds around" the dedication to God that was required and lived in Jesus. And yet that is what we should be striving for – even when we fail, we don't give up. We can continually ask God for strength and the courage to try.

Page 4

Songs such as we find in *Isaiah* help us find the words to say to each other as well as to ourselves. The sure and certain trust and belief expressed there gives us courage to face the unknown. The faith that stones would shout if we were silent raises in us a certitude that God's will will prevail – come hell or high water.

Today is Palm Sunday – this Sunday marks the beginning of the week when we take special observance of the last days of Jesus' life in human form. So our attention is turned toward those last hours he spent with the first disciples. So, perhaps, this is the best time to pause and reflect on God's sovereignty, and on our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. For as Paul pointed out so many years ago, "Each time we break the bread, and share the cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." That is just one of our tasks: to proclaim the life, death, and resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, until he comes again.

We also do this in word – our songs, and in deed – our actions. And to this end, I commend to you all that we surely trust in God and shout aloud for all to hear and know.

Let us pray: O holy and ever-loving God, we shout praise and our voices carry "Hosannas!" to Your Son this day, but we must confess that our voices will join the other crowds on Good Friday with cries of "Crucify Him!" for we are a fickle bunch, and we find it hard to understand why You don't come with all the power of heaven to fix our world, correct all wrongs, heal

Page 5

all injuries. Jesus, Your beloved, came into Jerusalem to die for our sakes, and we accept it without being shaken and disturbed by such a sacrifice. We want a king like those the world promotes, strong, silent, wise, and supportive of our agendas, our needs, our desires. But, You sent us a true king, wise, yes, strong, yes, but one who calls us into Your kingdom, where true justice is served, where true love is visible and experienced, where grace and mercy are granted without merit, and where complete

forgiveness is given and received. Equip us so to walk the whole way with Jesus, even to the cross, and then beyond; joining Jesus whom we acknowledge as King and Savior of this world. **Amen.**