

## Plains Baptist Church Palm/Passion Sunday, April 10, 2022

### Prayer Concerns

Sharon Axford, Cherie Doyon, Larry Seabrook, Evelyn Crafts' granddaughter Brittany, Vi, Jenny & family, Randy Greer, Cathy Tredenick, Karl Crocker, Linda Hepburn, Lori Ann, Shirley Griffin, Liz & Wayne Dieleman & family, Fraser (in Poland helping refugees escape Ukraine) the people of Ukraine, Clarence, Hill family, Aleta Behie, Bonnie & Paul

### Prayer

Thank you, God for all your gifts. On this Palm Sunday we give thanks for the gifts of joy and laughter. Joy and laughter greeted Jesus as he entered the gates of Jerusalem, surrounded by palm branches and partying pilgrims. Joy and laughter greeted us, too as we entered this sanctuary today. More muted that a crowd of pilgrims, but we are glad to wave our branches and celebrate Jesus for the king he is---the servant king — the humble sovereign—who poured himself out for the world. Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in your name, loving God!

Thank you, God for all your gifts. On this day when we remember how quickly a happy day can turn into a grim and somber one, we are so grateful that you are with us always—just as you were with Jesus as he grieved over the rejection he received from his people. We pray for those among us who are sad, frightened, anxious and grief laden this day. Be with the people we have named for prayers today. May your Spirit grant them added strength and courage in their hour of need.

Be with the Ukrainian people as atrocities continue to spread like a great blight upon their lands, their cities, their neighborhoods. Wrap love around them O God. May their distrust, grief, anger and fear be cradled by the caring people who are trying to help them. Be with our government and leaders of NATO and others as they do what they feel they can do to stop this menace. Be with the families and individuals of this church family as everyone struggles with lingering pandemic issues and deals with the upset, anxiousness and other mental and physical challenges some, of which the pandemic created or has aggravated.

We pray for our church and for all faith communities. Grant us courage, wisdom and hope as we move through this time of change to dream dreams and embrace the future with laughter, courage and hope. Help us to follow Jesus and his Way of steadfast compassion, daring obedience to your good purposes.

Help us to lean on your Spirit in this Holiest of weeks, trusting in your good purposes for us.

We praise you, our Creator, Redeemer and Friend, for your steadfast love is everlasting! We cling to that love, even as we wave branches and celebrate Jesus, as humble king of all. Amen

### Palm Gospel Luke 19: 28-40

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup>When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup>saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied

there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” <sup>32</sup>So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. <sup>33</sup>As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup>They said, “The Lord needs it.” <sup>35</sup>Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup>As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. <sup>37</sup>As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup>saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” <sup>39</sup>Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” <sup>40</sup>He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

### Passion Gospel Luke 19: 41-48

<sup>41</sup>As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, <sup>42</sup>saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup>Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. <sup>44</sup>They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.” <sup>45</sup>Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; <sup>46</sup>and he said, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer’; but you have made it a den of robbers.” <sup>47</sup>Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; <sup>48</sup>but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

### Sermon: IF THE STONES COULD SHOUT

This week a Detroit affiliate station for CBS offered a local spotlight on the city which featured a guitar maker. The guitars that are crafted are being created from wood gleaned from historic but dilapidated buildings in the city.

Apparently, these guitars have been made from reclaimed Detroit lumbers since 2014. Some of the wood from the Wallace Guitar Company came from the studio where the Supremes recorded. Other wood came from the gym where Joe Louis, boxer extraordinaire, trained. These guitars not only help to preserve the remnants of Detroit’s history—the history they embody enhances the value of the instruments for the seller and the buyers. At the end of the segment the reporter, Jackie Page, said, “If only the walls could talk.”

Maybe you’ve used that idiom to comment upon a place or a situation where significant events occurred. Maybe these events didn’t make the history books, yet they somehow impacted your life. I remember years ago, likely around 1970, my parents, that is, my mother decided that the plastered living room walls of the century plus farm house had to be renovated and replaced with drywall. When the old walls were removed, to my

surprise, we found old newspapers that had been adhered to the inside of the walls. There were also spikes protruding here and there, which I imagined may have been used as hooks for hanging coats. Whatever news of the day the newsprint revealed, they spoke to me of a time when the inhabitants of the house adhered newsprint to the board walls in an attempt in order to insulate them. The walls were telling me that I was very fortunate to be living in the era of fibreglass insulation!

Those news printed wall boards, made me think for likely the first time of the original inhabitants of my home. Who was the family that affixed those newspapers to the walls? What was life back then, like? If only the walls could talk!

“If only the walls could talk.” No one really seems to know the origin of this idiom. But it’s kind of similar to the response that Jesus gave to the Pharisees when he rode into Jerusalem to the shouts and praises of the crowds.

The Pharisees, alarmed at Jesus’ obvious popularity demanded that he tell his people to cease and desist with their shouts and songs. “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! To their indignant demand Jesus responded, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

What did Jesus mean by his answer, do you think? Did he really expect the stones to literally shout? Last night, for about the 10<sup>th</sup> time in my life, I watched the movie, *The Ten Commandments*. The stories of the Exodus are rife with instances of nature behaving supernaturally. Like when Moses heard God’s voice speaking in a burning bush that was not consumed by the flicking flames. But *stones* actually shouting? That’s *really* hard to imagine.

Jesus may have been using exaggeration to emphasize the import of the moment. The long-awaited Messiah, the King of kings had arrived, and during Passover! So, it was appropriate that the people’s joy and praises should not be suppressed but encouraged. And if for some reason that God’s people were forced to remain silent, then even inanimate objects would be compelled to fill the silence.

The rocks would be singing, “Blessed is the king” and “Glory in the highest heaven”. Even the pebbles and pavement would be shouting, “Hosanna”. The idea of stones crying out in praise to God is poetic, startling imagery, isn’t it? But it wasn’t startling to the people of Israel. They were familiar with the scriptures that presented inanimate objects praising God. We are familiar with them, too. For example, in Psalm 114, the mountains leap for joy. In Isaiah, it says that “the mountains and hills burst into song before God, and all the trees will clap their hands.” In other places the sun, moon and stars, animals praise their Creator God.

And so, it would not be as strange as we think for the Pharisees to hear Jesus’ talking about stones shouting. But then, it also would not be strange for the Pharisees to understand Jesus’ use of stones shouting in a different way; a more somber way. You see, the Pharisees were Biblical scholars. They read their Old Testament and did not neglect any book not

even the ones we think to be obscure and forgettable, like *Habakkuk*. We don't know much about the prophet of that name who is credited as the author of the book. Scholars think that he prophesied around the same time that Babylon was threatening to conquer his country. So that places him 500 years or so before Jesus was born. Habakkuk, speaking on God's behalf condemned those who gathered power and wealth for themselves by evil ways at the expense of others. Habakkuk preached that judgment would fall on these people and that even the stones in the walls of their homes would cry out in condemnation. This was a figurative way of saying that the people would be held to account for their actions and they would not be able to hide. For even the walls they hid behind to hide their disobedience, idolatry and violence would serve as witnesses against them. "If only the walls could talk."

Stones and rocks are plentiful in that land and they often served as important markers, marking a place where something important happened, so that when people saw the stone, they would remember. We follow similar practices to this day. We place grave markers at the graves of loved ones. Sometimes a picture or brief statement is inscribed to speak to the living about the person who is gone.

The great wall of China shouts to the world of an ancient people's ingenuity and creativity-- and fear of their neighbors. The stones of Stone Henge have spoken for centuries of a mysterious spirituality which drew people to the "otherness" of divine mystery long before Christianity came to England's shores.

Yesterday, Canadian politicians, indigenous leaders and veterans gathered at Ottawa's prominent stone marker—the war memorial, to commemorate the 105th anniversary of Vimy Ridge. The granite figures marching above the tomb of the unknown wept and warned of the sacrifices, horrors and high cost of war.

There is a story found in the Old Testament, where Joshua, Moses' successor, reminds the people of the requirements for serving God. He warns them of the serious consequences if they ever choose to turn away from their saving God. And then he set up a stone under an oak tree; the stone had been on the site where Joshua had instructed his people. The stone would serve to remind people of their commitment to God and if they broke that commitment, when they saw the stone the sight of it would silently convict them of their wrongs. If these ancient and familiar stories were behind Jesus' words about shouting stones, then the Pharisees were being duly warned. They were being warned that to refuse honor and praise to the kind of king God wanted for his people would cost them dearly. And the stones, the stones that they walked past as they marked the parade route, would in a few days remind them of a great injustice and the highest crime ever perpetrated ---the execution of their heaven-sent king.

This king's biggest crime was that he was not the kind of king that his people expected--- he was not heaven's version of Caesar— he was not a ruthless governor like Pilate--- he was not a politically astute fox, like Herod— This king was a servant. He was a giver not a taker, a teacher not a tyrant, a healer not a bully. Yet he was a passionate King-- and he demonstrated the depths of his passion as he gazed down upon the city's walls and wept. The walls spoke to his heart and to his soul. The walls told him about the centuries of

worship and warfare, centuries of pilgrimages and skirmishes, centuries of God's prophets murdered for telling truth to power, centuries of blessings and curses, centuries of God forgiving and saving his people. Do you know what the word "Hosanna" means? It does not mean "*Praise the Lord*", or "*Blessed is the King*" or "*Alleluia*" as we may think. It means "Save us." "Hosanna, Save us!" Jesus wept as he looked upon those stone walls and the magnificent temple. He wept as he heard the stones shouting, "Hosanna! Save us! Save us!"

He wept for those great walls as he imagined how they would look within a few years. In a few years they would be broken down, smashed, burned and trampled under the feet of Rome. By the time that Luke penned his gospel, the city had fallen to Roman legions and the Temple was destroyed, never to be rebuilt, not even to this very day.

After that, Luke writes, Jesus entered the Temple Mount climbed down from his donkey, strode into the Temple and chased out the moneychangers. This time Jesus did not rely on his disciples or the crowds or even stones to do the shouting. He shouted his indignation at the way his Father's house— had been converted from a place of worship into a place of questionable business practices.

"My house shall be a house of prayer but you have made it into a den of robbers," He raved, even as he opened cages and let the doves and lambs, meant for sacrifices, go free. Jesus was keenly aware, as he rid the temple of beasts and birds, that by the end of that week, there would never again be the need for animal sacrifice.

After a day of grim and stark darkness, a new day would dawn. A shining day loomed on the horizon, a day of grace, forgiveness, and healing for the world. And so the day we commemorate, one that began with palm branches waved and praises shouted, ends with weeping, pronouncements, violent disruptions and the promise of a new beginning.

This is the way Holy Week has always been like, my friends. It's always been a week that speaks to us of humanity's highs and lows, hosannas and hopelessness, poignant offerings of courage and love followed rash acts of betrayal and cowardice. Here we are, standing outside the walls of the holy, unholy city. God's city. And once again, as he always does, Jesus comes. He comes to show and tell humanity what it means to love and serve to the Nth degree. He has come to show us that God's reign is very much opposite of the way humans think the world should be run. He has come to bear witness to an eternal light that cannot be diminished, even by the gloom of a Good Friday, or the cruelty of Roman spears. He has come in answer to the *Hosannas* and *Blessed be's* that cannot be stifled or contained, not even by immovability of a great stone sealing a rock-hewn tomb. We will not wait for that great stone to shout to us of the promise that we know awaits us as it always has, on Easter day. Let us raise our voices to sing praises to our God for our humble king, who came to love, and to die so that in his name, all, may be made alive!

**Amen**

