

Message: Even Stones Will Shout

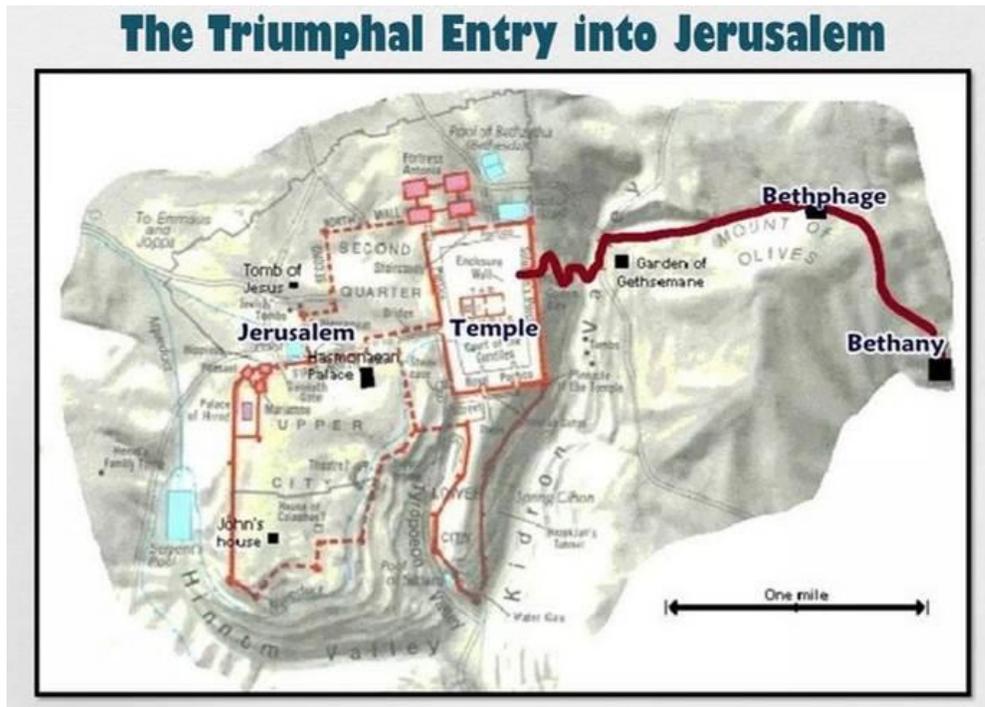
“It’s time!” Have you ever heard someone say that? It’s time ... for what? There are all sorts of moments that come to mind. For example,

- It’s time ... they’re waiting for you.
- It’s time ... the family’s here.
- It’s time ... for you to ... graduate, get married ... let go.

Here’s a good one: it’s time ... the baby’s coming!

What comes to mind for you?

Jesus knew it was time. For three years he’s been saying, *“Don’t tell anyone. Keep it to yourself. It’s not time yet”* (Luke 9:21, Matthew 17:9). Now it’s time. And so, right after the Jewish Sabbath, on the first day of the week before Passover, Jesus goes to the temple. He passes Bethany where Lazarus, Martha and Mary live. It’s near Bethphage (beth-faj), about a two mile walk from the temple. They’re near the summit of the Mount of Olives. Here's a picture ...



The simple act of entering the city through the temple sets off a chain of events that lead to Jesus’ arrest, false conviction, public humiliation, crucifixion, death and burial.

Some wonder if Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is more of a diversion than a prelude to what follows. Those who think it's a diversion see the parade as a high point in the darkness. The temple authorities are looking for Jesus. They want to arrest him and kill him. It's the calm before the storm. They've had their Sabbath rest and now the final act of the drama can begin.

Those who think it's a prelude see this as the beginning of what is to come. It's the start of a final, earthly act planned by God from the very beginning. Jesus' presence on earth is God's incarnate work among us to redeem us and save us from ourselves. This has always been God's intent. God made many promises and is keeping them.

No matter what view you hold, the parade is a declaration.

It's time! Jesus' hour has arrived. His greatest work is about to begin. We refer to it as the passion of Christ. This is the time of Jesus' strongest emotion, his most intense desire, his life's work, someone he's willing to suffer and die for.

Jesus came for a purpose: he came to save you, me and all people in the world, for all time. It's doesn't matter where we're from, how we dress, what language we speak or what our skin color, gender or lifestyle are, or even whether we believe in him or not, Jesus came to save us. Even more than that, Jesus died to save us to show us what comes next, to give us hope.

And so we gather, wave palms and join the parade on Palm Sunday.

While it's fun, it's more than that. We're showing each other and those who don't know or understand Jesus that we get it. It's time. It's our time to recognize who Jesus is, join the parade and shout the good news from the rooftops: our Messiah has come! All of creation celebrates.

It's not just about a moment, it's about the right moment.

Jesus knew what was to happen. He was concerned about the right time. Jesus was, with God, ordering events in the way that would reach the desired outcome. He had to build the narrative. Jesus set the stage so we, who would come to see and hear, would finally understand and accept. He made sure we would understand his story is our story. We had to see ourselves lived out in him. We had to find ourselves in him.

Too soon, and we wouldn't hear; too late, and we would have missed it. Jesus waited until the right moment.

It's time. Jesus makes an announcement. But rather than sending a memo, rather than posting a thesis on church doors or writing in fiery letters across the sky, he used the language of culture. Jesus orchestrated a processional drama, an enthronement scene acted out in the symbols commonly understood by everyone in that time. And he touched a need, a hope rising in the hearts of the people. This was why they responded to his announcement so readily then and every year since.

Jesus arranged for a colt, an unriden donkey symbolizing purity and peace. They waved branches to acknowledge his authority. They threw down their cloaks to cover the road and usher the prince into their midst. They shouted the traditional welcome to a new king: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

Given Jesus' earlier reluctance to declare himself, he's practically shouting now. "Here I am," he shows, "your king, your prince of peace, your savior." And the people heard it, loudly and clearly. That is why they shouted back, "Hosanna!" which means, "Save us." Maybe it was a group thing. Maybe it was desperation. Or maybe they had a hint this indeed was the one who could save them. So, they shouted and pulled branches off trees and threw their clothes into the street as a welcome. They heard and responded.

But the people who gathered weren't the only ones who heard. Some of the Pharisees (and notice Luke's careful identification of "some" of the Pharisees - like he is preparing the way for the division that was coming) - some of the Pharisees - heard and didn't like what they heard. "Keep it down!" they shouted to the self-professed king on a colt. "Shut them up, or there will be trouble." They're looking down their noses with contempt at the rabble grasping at their palms. At the same time, they're looking over their shoulders in fear of Rome who didn't like any disturbance they didn't cause. "Tell them to stop!"

And here is what distinguishes Luke's memory of this event from the rest. Luke leaves out the "Hosanna" the others record. But he is the only one who records Jesus' curious response to the plea of some of the

Pharisees to keep quiet. “I tell you,” says Jesus, “if these were silent, the stones would shout out!”

It’s absolutely necessary to praise God. When it’s time, it’s time.

The purposes of God will be fulfilled, no matter whether we agree with them or disagree with them.

The only question is, “Will we join in or let it pass us by?”

“It’s time,” says Jesus as he sits on the humble little colt. It’s time for the prophesied events to unfold. These events can gather us up and carry us to a new reality, a new way of living, a new hope. Or these events can pass us by if we so choose.

But choose we must. It’s time. Palm reading is a delicate enterprise, but this is our story being told in an ancient text. It’s your future, your opportunity.

What do you see? Hosanna.

Let us pray ...

Jesus, what can we say? We hear the story of your last hours and feel your passion, love and majesty. Tears come to our eyes, for we, too, betray, deny and run away from you. We aren’t present at the foot of your cross. We prefer our own way. We choose comfort and convenience over faith and sacrifice. Forgive us, Lord. Forgive us for the way we use our words and actions to pierce others, without realizing that we are really piercing you. Open our ears. Open our hearts. Open our minds. Open our doors. Let love enter in so healing may begin. And open our mouth to share the good news, for if we don’t even the stones will shout. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Isaiah 50:4-9a (CEB)

The Lord God gave me an educated tongue to know how to respond to the weary with a word that will awaken them in the morning.

God awakens my ear in the morning to listen, as educated people do.

The Lord God opened my ear; I didn't rebel; I didn't turn my back.

Instead, I gave my body to attackers, and my cheeks to beard pluckers. I didn't hide my face from insults and spitting.

The Lord God will help me; therefore, I haven't been insulted.

Therefore, I set my face like flint, and knew I wouldn't be ashamed.

The one who will declare me innocent is near.

Who will argue with me? Let's stand up together.

Who will bring judgment against me? Let him approach me.

Look! The Lord God will help me.

Luke 19:28-40 (CEB)

After Jesus said this, he continued on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As Jesus came to Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he gave two disciples a task. He said, "Go into the village over there. When you enter it, you will find tied up there a colt that no one has ever ridden.

Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks, 'Why are you untying it?' just say, 'Its master needs it.'" Those who had been sent found it exactly as he had said.

As they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "Its master needs it." They brought it to Jesus, threw their clothes on the colt, and lifted Jesus onto it. As Jesus rode along, they spread their clothes on the road.

As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all the mighty things they had seen. They said,

"Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens."

Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!"

He answered, "I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout."