

Stones Cry Out

Luke 19:28-40

Some of you know that I didn't go to college at Iowa State, even though I've been here long enough to have graduated several times over. I did attend Valparaiso University, which most people around here know of as where Scott Drew coached before he went to coach Baylor. But one of my favorite buildings at Valpo, one that I spent a lot of time in, is the chapel. Depending on who you talk to, it's one of the largest collegiate chapels in the United States. It was built that way, large and in the center of the campus, so that it would always proclaim what the purpose of the university is. The president of the university at the time it was built, OP Kretzmann, said in a later address; "When this chapel was built ... all who had anything to do with it—designers, architects, planners, generous donors, friends—all had a definite purpose expressed in various ways. This chapel was to be a monument to Jesus Christ. It was to say that we, so late in time, still cling to the God of Grace, Redemption and Sanctification. ... This chapel began to call us into the years that lie before us. So, if at some dim and distant time we might have here a faculty, students and administration who no longer believe in the purposes of this chapel, it will still be necessary for them to come to terms with what this chapel represents. They can never quite get away from this silent witness to our faith."

We see that too at Iowa State. The east side of the Parks Library at Iowa State, the old section, has written on it the words, "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," taken from John 8:32. It's harder to see with the construction around it now, and it's not as used as the modern new front entrance, but it's still there. When those words were put up on the wall, it was still possible for a state university to acknowledge the Bible as a source of truth.

On the other hand, there used to be a chapel in the Memorial Union, set apart as a Christian gathering place. In fact, the Union was constructed so that the Memorial Hall was built directly over the library and the chapel, because in order to stand up and give your life to your country you must have a foundation in faith and knowledge. But over time the area became an art gallery. The chapel, now called a reflection room, was temporarily closed when I went to look at it earlier this week. If you didn't know it was there, you'd miss it. Just because something is built doesn't mean it can't be changed.

As Jesus enters into Jerusalem in the Triumphal Entry, on what we celebrate today as Palm Sunday, those who gathered hope they can be set free. Set free from the occupation of the Romans, set free from unjust taxation, set free from tyranny and oppression. And although the crowd was peaceful, there was always an undercurrent of tension. The religious leaders in Jerusalem, those charged with keeping the uneasy balance in place between the Jewish people and the Roman authorities, were frightened by the crowd. It was getting much too loud. They anticipated a riot, so they wanted the crowd to be quiet. But Jesus knew that wouldn't happen. He says, in a saying unique to Luke's Gospel, that if the crowds were quiet, the very stones would cry out.

Some of the stones that could have cried out were the stones of the temple. They proclaimed the glory of God, but they also proclaimed the glory of King Herod, whose expansions had made it one of the most magnificent buildings of the time. It was an extraordinary piece of construction, and looked like it could stand forever. Later, when Jesus and his disciples are standing closer to the temple, they'll marvel at

the large stones like the country bumpkins they are. Jesus, though, will tell them that as impressive as those stones are, “the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (Luke 21:6).

That talk, the idea that the temple would be destroyed despite its strong stones, would be the basis of the final accusations against Jesus. As he goes through his trials, the only thing the witnesses agree on is that he promised to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. And then as Jesus foretells, though his followers become silent, like Peter disavowing him in his final hours and the others scattering, the stones cry out as an earthquake rattles the land at Jesus' death. That would lead to the stone whose message was that death had won, that another would-be Messiah had been defeated, the stone that would be rolled in front of the tomb after his crucifixion.

The rocks that cause us to remember and think the most are tombstones, the rocks that remind us not just of those who have gone before us, but that we cannot escape death, the consequences of sin in the world. That's true for the stone rolled across the grave of Jesus. That's true of the gravestones that mark our cemeteries today.

However, God does not let the rock of death get the final word. When the rock was rolled away from the tomb of Jesus that first Easter morning, we were shown that God redeems us, saves us from sin and death. Jesus had crushed the power of sin, death, and the devil. The stone that once cried out the power of death now cries out the power of life.

With the victory of sin and death shown by the rock that was rolled away from the tomb, we become rocks as well. Not people with rock-hard hearts or thick skins or thick heads, but

living stones. The rocks that God continues to use to build up the church, to build up the world. The rocks that God uses to show his protection and kindness in the world to those around us. Rocks that cry out and share that message with those around us. We are those living stones, the temple of the Lord's dwelling, who shout out in response to Christ, our risen Lord.

If you go to Ada Hayden, Brookside Park, or Emma McCarthy Lee Park here in Ames, you'll see piles of stones. Special piles of stones. An inuksuk is a stone monument constructed for the purpose of navigation by the Inuit people of northern Canada. Inuksuit designate good hunting or fishing areas, mark trails, and serve as a point of reference for travelers.

The Israelites did something similar. When the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to get into the promised land, they were commanded to bring out 12 stones from the riverbed and carry them and use them as a marker to remind them of how God had helped them. Samuel raised a stone of help to commemorate a victory over the Philistines, that was called Ebenezer means “stone of help.” From then on, every time an Israelite saw the stone erected by Samuel, he would have a tangible reminder of the Lord's power and protection. The “stone of help” marked the spot where the enemy had been routed and God's promise to bless His repentant people had been honored. The Lord had helped them, and the stones would help them remember.

In Psalm 98, we hear, “Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together.” Psalm 19 begins with the words “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” If nature praises God for all He has done, shouldn't we?

We use rocks to help us remember. Whether it's a small pebble carried in a pocket to remind us of a promise, a rock placed in a ring or piece of jewelry to remind us of love and commitment, or the larger buildings of rock that remind us of those who have gone before us in life, we still use rocks to help us remember. May the cry of the stones help us to remember all that God has done for us, as well.

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