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Imagine today you are going about your daily routine, sitting here in worship, or maybe this afternoon when you return home you enjoy a quiet day. Suddenly something unusual catches your attention. You hear or see something out of the ordinary, and it prompts you to stop and pay attention. What sound or sight might occur that would suddenly grab your attention? ...



Oftentimes it's those bright and flashy or loud and boisterous things that catch our attention. An unusual sound could catch your ear, such as a siren or a sudden windstorm. Or a bright flash of light may prompt your eye to investigate what just occurred.



Imagine you had gathered in the streets of Jerusalem 2000 years ago. The day seems like any other ordinary day. You feel a gentle breeze across your face and see it blowing the leafy branches in the trees. You smell the food of the vendors—you can almost taste the fresh bread prepared early that morning. Your ears hear the sounds of people bartering with those selling items along the streets as they try to get a lower price for the fresh foods in



the market. Out of the corner of your eye, you catch a glimpse of the colors of the fresh olives and dates as you pass those selling produce.

And then a stirring in the crowd catches your attention. There seems to be a commotion up ahead. Several people in the crowd appear to be cutting palm branches off the trees—waving them while others scatter the branches on the ground. Members of the crowd begin spreading clothing on the ground, creating what appears to be a path along the dusty road.



Suddenly your ear catches voices shouting "hosanna," which you know means "Save us, we pray!" You recall the times you've heard this word shouted as a form of praise, as in the songs sung during worship in the temple. Psalm 118 comes to mind as you listen to the shouts of hosanna,



Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!

O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!  
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.

We bless you from the house of the LORD.  
The LORD is God, and he has given us light.  
Bind the festal procession with branches...<sup>1</sup>

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Suddenly the branches spread on the ground begin to make sense, for they echo the words of the psalm; this is a “festal procession with branches”! You realize you are witnessing an ancient practice done to welcome royalty! You attempt to stand up straight, peering over the heads of those in front of you, to catch a glimpse of the person entering town. Who could it be? The citizens of Jerusalem wouldn’t get this excited about a Roman governor visiting town. Maybe one of the warriors fighting against the Romans is returning from battle, but would he want this much attention drawn to him during the Passover festival? Surely the Roman officials watching the crowds would not tolerate such a brazen act when so many people had gathered in town for the Passover. Who could be entering the city?

You catch a glimpse of the man riding into town along the pathway composed of palm branches and clothing. Although you cannot see what he’s riding, you know the animal must be small. If it’s a horse, it must be a pony, for the rider appears to be riding



close to the ground. If a warrior came into town, he would have ridden a mighty horse, tall and muscular, so it seems odd that someone would ride such a small animal.

But wait, it’s not a horse. It’s a donkey! You laugh to yourself, thinking this humorous scene looks just the opposite look of a mighty warrior. Why would people welcome such a humble rider on a donkey? What prompted them to such a response? This man surely isn’t a warrior. Who could he be?

You begin to think of the stories of your ancestors who rode on donkeys when they lived in the hill country, for donkeys were safer to ride in the mountains since they were more surefooted than horses and were less likely to stumble. When King David gave instructions for the anointing of his son Solomon as the next king, he had his son ride a donkey, possibly representing the sure-footedness of this next leader.<sup>2</sup>



Suddenly the clothing on the ground begins to make sense, for it reminds you of the story of when Jehu was secretly anointed king of Israel. When fellow commanders learned he was selected as their

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next king, they took off their coats and threw them at Jehu's feet as a sign of their respect and loyalty to him.<sup>3</sup>



Could the crowd know something about the selection of this humble man riding into town as their next king? Could the palm branches and coats on the ground represent their hopes that he would lead them to victory against the Romans? But how could this simple man overthrow the Roman soldiers, for he did not wear any armor, nor did he carry any weapon.

The crowd continues to shout, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Suddenly one of the religious leaders appears from among the crowd, ordering the people to stop shouting such words. The religious leader was probably just trying to keep the peace, for he probably wanted to avoid any trouble during the Passover festival. The Passover recalled how God helped their people escape from the Pharaoh thousands of year before, but allowing the crowd to celebrate someone as a king would surely disturb the festival. I suppose it

made sense for the leaders to try and quiet the crowd.

You catch a glimpse of Jesus riding the donkey, who stops directly in front of the religious leaders. His eye scanned the crowd, almost as though he was looking for someone in particular. Imagine he looked straight at you; you get the feeling that he cares a great deal about your life.



As the religious leaders demand that Jesus tell his followers to be quiet, he replies, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

What would you have done? Continue shouting about this amazing event? Or remain silent and listen for the stones to shout? I sometimes wonder if we today have become mute, as though we are waiting for the stones to shout out the news of what God is doing in the world. God continues to do amazing things, but sometimes we become numb in the midst of all the news we hear about the conflicts in the world. We feel the sting of the verbal stones that people hurl at one another, or we believe that we don't have anything worthwhile to say in the face of those who loudly proclaim extremist views.

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We know we don't agree with those who make the most noise, but sometimes we are reluctant to offer a gentle voice, for we are unsure what to say.



This morning I suggest we cannot remain silent, that we have some good news to proclaim about Jesus's entrance into the world. Even the stones can no longer remain

silent, for they gently proclaim that God is offering hope to the world. Our voices proclaim from our 113 missionaries that serve in 38 countries of the world, to the 242 congregations like Crossroads who are striving toward transformation, to the Disciples congregations who have helped resettle over 1000 refugees.

Our voices proclaim that God is also moving in the world here close to our homes. Each time you

offer a gentle word of hope to someone who is struggling with an illness, you proclaim God's care. When you listen to someone trying to make a difficult decision, you offer a sign of God's presence. As you offer food to someone hungry, you reflect God's concern for those who hunger and thirst.

Through your acts of kindness, the stones join you in proclaiming that God is moving in the world. The palm branches wave to signal that Jesus continues to enter our lives. So may you continue to wave the branches—and join the shouting stones in proclaiming the good news of what God is doing in the world!

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Ps 118:25-27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 1:32-35

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kings 9:6-13