

Days Later: Talking Stones
April 1, 2007 – Palm Sunday
Rev. Mary A. James

We just couldn't go the whole way. These are dangerous times, and in the end, many of us who have followed him ended up hiding; word is that some of his closest followers denied they even knew him. And it seems incredible that we could deny him, because we knew so deeply in our hearts the truth of his message. We recognized it then that day when he arrived in Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey—and we cheered! I am just a poor woman, and these past months his message and his presence gave me great hope. But by the time Jesus was arrested and hung up on that cross, most of us had hidden, or run away scared, or pretended we never knew what we had known so deeply only days before.

When I let myself remember in my heart those moments of recognition on that Sunday, it makes me weep. In his own impossibly brave way, he tried to show us that he was, indeed, the king who came in the name of the Lord. Long ago written the prophet Zechariah had written that God would appear on the Mount of Olives. That's where Jesus was when he sent two of his disciples to find a colt never ridden before! Just in case any of us missed the enactment of Zechariah's prophecy about the Mount of Olives, when we saw him ride in on that colt, we heard the prophet's words ringing inside our heads: "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." There was no mistaking who Jesus was on that day, and our hearts sang.

There was quite a crowd gathered—it was really just a procession of peasants. When word spread that a royal Lord had sought a colt, people began to talk. Who was this important person who was in the area? As he rode in, it all clicked. Jesus had taught with such authority and passion, and he had healed with such love and compassion. He welcomed the unwelcome and blessed little children. Such deeds of power had come from him! In that moment that he rode in on the colt, we understood. We spread our cloaks on the road before him as we would for royalty. We cheered with joy, understanding—if only for a short time—who Jesus was. We called out: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"

You know, there were some voices in the crowd that day that seemed at odds with those of us who were cheering. Some of the Pharisees said to him that he should tell us all to stop shouting. If they were afraid, they had good reason to be. They knew as well as we all did that on the other side of the city Pontius Pilate and his imperial procession were arriving to keep order during the week of Passover. "Teacher," they said, "tell your disciples to stop all the racket!" What he said next seemed so very true at the time. Our hearts were so certain then. He looked at the Pharisees with that gentle, fierce, wise intensity—that utterly full presence of his, and he said, "I tell you, if these people were silent, the stones would shout out." I am sure he was right. We saw him so clearly that day. Surely, if we couldn't have found the words, the stones themselves would have announced him!

Have you ever forgotten or abandoned something you once knew in your heart to be the absolute truth? Have you ever let fear keep you from what you know is right and good and true? I will say this: we knew that day that Jesus, the Teacher, the Healer, the bringer of peace and the protector of the weak and the despised, was the King we had all waited for. We knew that day in our hearts that this humble man who resembled no king we had ever heard of was indeed the truest kind of royalty. That day, the stones would have called it out, if we hadn't. Days later, we became afraid. Days later, we had forgotten what we knew. Days later, he would be placed in a tomb, and the only stone that matters now is the one that sealed the entrance to it. What happened? I don't understand, or maybe I don't want to understand.

Yes, there is only one stone that matters now. And it doesn't seem to be talking.