

The Stones Shout – a sermon based on Luke 19:28-40 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Palm Sunday, 20 March 2016.

“If these disciples were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Yes, but what would they shout?

I have been paying attention to the stones on which I walk, noticing what I have been hearing.

Several times during the last few weeks, I have walked from here to the hospital and back, a few hundred metres.

I have listened to people speak of vulnerability, of their sense of the closeness of death even when in good health, and the miracle of healing, of the skill of doctors and the sustained concentration of medical professionals, of the care of nurses and support staff, of food that is good enough most days, of antibiotics and medicines that extend life unimagined generations ago, of equipment that keeps lungs breathing and hearts pumping and brains functioning.

I have heard people speak about falling ill for the first time, and of how that changes their perception of themselves, that they are vulnerable, that they are not teenagers any more, that they are not always resilient and strong and courageous and vigorous.

I have heard people speak about the inherent risk of life, of how, while they have fallen ill, how easy it is in a moment of thoughtlessness and distraction, to step off a footpath and be hit by a bus, and it is final, utterly final.

I have heard people speak about their changing bodies, of nagging ailments, that nag longer, and persist more, and never seem to go away, and of how bodily weakness changes how they see themselves, how others see them, and they wonder about what it might mean for their quality of life, their future, as they reduce the amount of valued possessions they have accumulated.

I have heard people around the hospital, wondering, questioning, looking for hope, and despairing, some grief stricken; other people recovering, overcome with gratitude, for the skill and the care and the support.

And I have heard people wondering what contributed to them being there, what was in them, around them, near them, in the part of town they lived, that triggered illness.

What do the stones cry out?

I went to a meeting of inner city ministers at All Saints, where the vicar there, Michael Wallace, told of being in Castle Street just after the balcony fell a couple of weeks ago. He was there among hundreds of students for four hours, many drunk, walking on the stones beneath the glass.

Michael, with his ministerial collar, being called out to, “preach it father,” give us a sermon” and a few other suggestions.

And he watched a group of students, who had just seen the balcony fall, and the woman with a hurt back and people bloodied. He saw this group of students walk along the road and put themselves in exactly the situation they had just witnessed minutes before with terrible consequences.

So why do we not make the connection between what we see - the blood, the broken body, and our own riskiness and vulnerability and capacity to damage? Why does alcohol hold New Zealand so much in its sway? Why do we not make the connection when we see personal harm right in front of us?

What do the stones cry out?

I walk over the stones around this church, and I hear people away from home for the first time, away from what is known and trusted and familiar, learning a new city, a new climate, a new living situation, trying to find friends, trying to work out who will be good friends, trying to establish a new pattern, and learning how to study amid more freedom and more choice and more space than they have had before, and trying to find a good way, a living way, a sustainable way.

What do the stones cry out?

And I watch people walk over the stones in the grounds of Knox Church, the new asphalt, the students and teachers and workers who short-cut through our grounds, their grounds, and I see dozens of tourists taking photos and coming inside the church, and I wonder whether they sense anything more than a beautiful building and a convenient path, is there anything more here that would change their lives completely, and how can I help them sense that?

What do these stones cry out?

For across these stones comes a man riding a donkey.

In Luke’s gospel there are no palms, only cloaks.

And not everyone cries out, only the disciples.

So its loud enough to be irritating, but not overwhelming.

Praising God joyfully for all the deeds of power they have seen.

The deeds of power – what are they?

People in the hospital being supported by family, prayed for by friends, surrounded by care – deeds of power.

People in hospital, students, us, sensing how vulnerable, susceptible, we are, learning more of our humanness, our createdness, our limits – deeds of power.

People knowing grief, struggling to keep going, somehow surviving – deeds of power;

People being healed and emerging with a sense of gratitude, a new appreciation for the wonder of their body, perhaps with a sense of second chance, maybe with an new appreciation for life – deeds of power.

An Anglican priest willing to be made fun of, to be laughed at, giving as good as he gets, among drunk people walking on glass – deeds of power.

People who walk through our grounds, who use our buildings, who walk past our church, being listened to, taken seriously, valued, cherished, honoured, engaged – deeds of power

The disciples had seen deeds of power and it drove them to praise God joyfully.

We are part of this procession today, a movement of ages, praising God joyfully because we have seen deeds of power.

We are part of the procession - not people who watch safely from the balcony or observe thoughtfully from the footpath or note anonymously from our offices.

As someone said, we are not fans of Jesus, we are followers of Jesus.

How do we praise God joyfully walking on the stones that shout out?

I read last week an interview by an Australian New Testament scholar who had made a journey from atheism to faith.

He said of his previous life: “I was convinced there was a sense of awe, there was a moral fabric to the universe, so a lot of [Christianity] did make sense to me.

“I didn’t wander around with a heavy weighted conscience looking for a deliverer,” he says. “To be perfectly honest, I think that aspect is really left over from Christendom. If you live in a Christian context where people are preaching sin and law, then you can have a heavy

conscience. But if you live in an amoral world, as I think we do now, I think that the biggest thing that we tend to wander around with is looking for meaning and hope.

“We’re looking for a life that has meaning, purpose, value and hope, which what I would call the consumerised hedonism of our own culture doesn’t provide.”

Is that what the stones cry out, for meaning, purpose, value and hope?

I look to this man riding a donkey.

Purpose – to love God and my neighbour and myself.

Value – I am cherished by God, loved by God, in the image of God.

Hope – of a new creation, the palm branches, the natural world, waving, creation restored, healed, flourishing.

Meaning – sensing it is somehow tied to this man and the procession that I join in following him.

Singing joyfully because all around I see deeds of power.

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