

“The Whole City Was in Turmoil”

Matthew 21:1-11

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There is a scene in a number of movies where a newspaper boy is running through a city's streets, pausing at intersections, a sack of newspapers slung over his shoulder, and yelling,

“Extra, extra! Reading all about it! Read all about it!”

And these words stir up a frenzy on the city sidewalks. Suddenly, everybody's talking about the fast-breaking news story. Meadow Lark Lemon and the Globe Trotters are coming to town! Or, The Dodgers are Moving to LA! Or, Neil Armstrong walks on the Moon!

The newspaper boy shouts; the word gets out; and the city is in a turmoil. Such is the scene in the City of Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday morning. Peter and Mary, James and Martha, Andrew and Salome were working the crowd, spreading the word that the Messiah is approaching the City; God's Anointed One coming to town! The Sovereign of the World is about to make a grand entrance.

Now, this would not have been the first time such news had roared through the city. In Jerusalem, the messianic expectation was running high. Others claiming to be the Messiah had come along before, announcing themselves as the 'chosen' one. But each had proven to be a false hope. So, some in the crowd were thinking, “Oh, here we go again.” While others were hopeful, “Maybe this is the One!” The whole city was in a turmoil.

Unlike the Messianic pretenders, Jesus of Nazareth came into the Holy City riding on a lowly mule, a picture of humility, a symbol of power surrendered. No royal crown upon his head, he rides into town on a donkey; no purple robes flowing in the breeze, he enters the city to be a different kind of ruler, a different kind of sovereign whose realm would be the human heart.

Extra, extra! Read all about it! Read all about it! Jesus Christ has come to be the governor of the human heart!! Has come to establish LOVE as the real source of power and influence!!

This caused the whole city to be in turmoil. The local power brokers were threatened by this turn of events. Local dignitaries didn't know how to cope with this new kind of authority. Elected officials squirmed at the thought of a Ruler ruling by love instead of coercion, ruling by compassion instead of by intimidation, ruling by mercy instead of by oppression.

The hopes of the crowd soared. At last, a Messiah who spoke their language, a Messiah who walked in their sandals, a Messiah who shared their common humanity. We can picture the opposing voices lining up on opposite sides of the road. The local power people are shouting, "Hold it down! Silence! Go back to your villages!" The crowd of disciples shouts back, "Hosanna. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven!" Back and forth they shout: Hosanna! Silence! Hosanna! Pipe down! Hosanna! Not another word!

The tension mounts. The whole city is in turmoil. It reminds me of the Sunday I went to a Southern Baptist Church with my college roommate and his family in San Antonio. Dr. Buckner Fanning was the preacher that day. On the way back to the dorm, in the car, Mr. Pritz asked me what I thought of the preacher.

I said I thought he had done a little too much shouting. Mr. Pritz whipped around in his seat and looked back at me and said, “What else is there to shout about?” That silenced me...for the moment. He caused me to reflect on what IS worth shouting about anyway?

I guess I like the idea of having something to shout about!
I think of Paul Revere shouting, “The British are coming!”
I think of Texans shouting “Remember the Alamo!”
I think of Martin Luther King shouting, “I have a dream!”
I think of Elizabeth Katy Stanton shouting, “I voted today!”
I think of Russell Allen shouting, “I passed my driver’s test!”
I think of Reverend John Ramaker running from the parsonage to this South Church bell tower in 1945 and ringing the bells so loud they were actually shouting “The War is over! The War is over!”

I ask you, “What do you find that’s worth shouting about?”
On that Palm Sunday morning, some of the disciples shouted ‘Hosanna!’ which means, “Save us, we beseech thee!”

A man born blind shouts, “He restored my sight!”
A woman shouts, “He welcomed me when no one else would.”
A child hollers, “He is the first one to take me seriously.”
A woman of Samaria cries out, “He stored my soul.”
An elder shouts, “He redeemed my life from the pit.”
A youth makes a megaphone with her hands and shouts,
“Finally, a man who respects me!”

I think churches are too quiet these days. We drive by them and hardly notice their existence. Even on Sunday mornings, there’s hardly a peep out of the churches. Yet, it’s the churches of Jesus Christ who have cause to shout! I’d like to hear some shouting around here, some spiritual shouting!

Social Action Board; what do you want the world to hear? Shout it out!

Mission Board, how are your partners in ministry transforming the lives of the poor? Shout it out!

Deacons, what do you witness in Bible study that stirs you to the point of shouting?

Trustees, if you shout loud enough, we'll all come to the work day at the end of April!

Board of Discipleship Education, where do you notice the evidence of faith formation? Shout it out!

If it's true that everyday is an Easter Day, it's also true that everyday is a Palm Sunday Day. Sisters and brothers, through these next seven days of Holy Week, let us reflect together on what it is we have in Christ that gives us a reason to shout!

In the greatest of hope, Amen!