

Jim “Jet” Jackson, taught biology. He had a corny sense of humor; he called the plastic, take-apart, life-size model of a human body and all its organs, *Napoleon*, “Because,” he said, “you can take his bone apart.” But, besides the corn, he had a real passion for biology. He knew most of us weren’t there because we hoped to become doctors or scientists but to fulfill a graduation requirement. But he believed that through energy, that corny sense of humor, and creative use of earthworms, frogs, and fetal pigs, he could spark our interest in biology. That’s why, though it seemed like bragging when, on the first day of class, he said, “I could teach a rock biology,” most of us came to believe him.

So, I can believe that a brilliant teacher can teach a rock biology. But can you teach a rock to shout?

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, riding on a donkey, the people throw their cloaks before him, and praise God for all Jesus had done, shouting, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

This upset Jesus’ critics. They’d worked out an arrangement with Rome and don’t want it disrupted. So they say, “Tell your people to shut up!” Tame the outburst, tone down the uproar. A crowd waving throwing cloaks on the road, shouting that a new king had come was a threatening sign.

But Jesus response is interesting: “Even if you could quiet them down, the very stones would shout.”

There is something about Jesus that can make even a rock want to shout.

Jesus got this way of thinking from the Hebrew Scriptures where trees clap their hands for joy, hills skip into a dance, waves cry out, and mountains shout. The Bible says that matter can sing.

When I camp out, I’m struck by how loud nature is. It’s alive with sound. Night falls, creatures call to each other, continuing through the night, then dawn comes, and others begin their chorus. It’s not just animals, winds roar, water gushes, rocks tumble. There’s no way to shut up all that stuff.

A great hymns sings, “The heavens are telling the glory of God.” Even the material universe sings!

Those who want to keep a lid on things, who want things as they are, don’t like commotion or noise, always try to keep things quiet. Jesus came to town as a new leader, which threatened the powerful. When children and the powerless began to praise and shout hosanna, they were threatened even more. “Be quiet!” they said. But Jesus said, “If you silenced them, even the stones would shout.”

Parents bring children to worship saying “Hush! Use your “church voice!” as if, “church voices” are soft voices. But here Jesus defends a noisy outburst by his followers. He says that if they were silent, even the stones would shout. So, maybe, “church voices,” the voices of his followers, should be loud.

In 1981, when Berlin, Germany, was still divided by an iron curtain, I visited a church in communist, East Berlin. The church was at the end of a walled, dead-end street, in the midst of a Russian military base. That Sunday, the once magnificent, old building crumbling from years of neglect by a poor, tiny congregation (to be a Christian automatically excluded you from a college education or a decent paying job), who still dared to be seen going down that street, knowing that there were surely informers from the *STASI*, the secret police among the worshippers, the pastor’s voice rang out, “The church is the only place left where anyone dares say anything loudly.”

It took courage to say that, and the courage to be one of the few there to hear him, who the powerful had tried to silence by making sure that those who worshipped Jesus had no hope of going to college or getting a good job. They were speaking up for him, refusing to be silent, making their witness.

After a three-hour service in an African American church in poor part of a city, a white visitor asked, the pastor, half joking, “Why are black people so loud when they worship?” The pastor had preached a long sermon, in which he shouted and screamed, and there’d been thunderous singing, too. The pastor shook his head sadly and said, “It makes white people nervous when we get happy, doesn’t it? Why’s our worship so loud? We’ve got people here who’ve spent their whole lives keeping quiet. They’re expected to silently wait on tables, to make up rich people’s beds and clean their houses for low pay and say nothing. They’re never asked what they think about anything. They’re never invited to comment on anything. They are voiceless. Silent! So, in church we give them a voice. We tell them that this is free space, God-created space, and if they want to shout, they can.”

So, it seems that a typical, faithful response to Jesus is - shouting. When Jesus sets foot in town, people – especially the voiceless – speak up. And as Jesus says, all creation can shout his glory.

It’s God’s nature to have a witness, to enable testimony. On Palm Sunday, children looked at Jesus and saw who he really was. He was coming to take charge, riding on the back of a donkey to rule. They shouted that their deliverance was at hand. The powerful tried to threaten and intimidate his little witnesses, but Jesus defiantly said that even if they shut them up, the very stones would cry out.

Have you ever heard a stone sing? They do! God helps them.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, God helped children, the poor, and powerless. In World War I it was German and French soldiers singing carols to each other across the trenches, then venturing out to exchange gifts. Then it was African-Americans singing freedom songs in the Civil Rights era, or those who simply dared to worship behind the iron curtain, or blacks in South Africa singing their hopes of liberation. When Jesus says he can teach even stones to shout, he means all kinds of places.

It’s God’s nature to have a witness, to raise the dead, to have someone to testify and tell the story. Some among us aren’t good at public speaking. Others are reserved, shy, and self-effacing. Yet, God’s given them something to say, made them witnesses. Somehow, God gets God’s word spoken.

Today, as this new king intrudes among us and challenges our settled arrangements with unrighteousness, here’s what I hear the stones saying: “Follow him! Join the parade of those who through the ages have looked at this carpenter’s son bouncing in on the back of a donkey and seen their Lord and their Savior. Jesus Christ is Lord! Let’s go after him. Let’s walk behind him.”

There’s a wonderful poem, by Tom Kroger, that speaks of what Jesus, and all who’ve truly followed him through the ages shout out for us to do today. It says,

*The rocks would shout if we kept still and failed to share the words.*

*....It is the Lord’s insistent will that the truth be told and heard.*

*We are called to bear with grace the scorn of hearts so often bruised,*

*....that when we tell of hope reborn they fear to trust the news.”*

Lord Jesus, on this day you were welcomed in triumphant procession into Jerusalem.

Give us the grace to welcome you into our lives, into our homes, and into our communities.

Enable us to put our trust in you that we find, in you, the Lord of our lives.

Thank you for the holy moment when the crowd in Jerusalem glimpsed, even briefly, who you are –  
....the servant king who is the savior of the world.

Grant us the joy to raise our voices and shout your praises – loud and clear, as those children did,  
....and as your faithful have done in every time and place, often in great adversity and at great cost,  
....to give you praise and glory.

Grant us ears to hear and be inspired by the shouts of the faithful in our own time and place,  
....calling us to greater courage and faithfulness.

Thank you for this blessed moment, when we see in the discipleship of our children  
....the fulfillment of the promise that at your name every knee shall bow,  
....and every tongue confess that you are Lord.

For all these blessed times, we lift our hearts and voices in praise! We say Hallelujah.