Deuteronomy 32:36–39

**For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free. 37 Then he will say, ‘Where are their gods, the rock in which they took refuge, 38 who ate the fat of their sacrifices and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you;**

**let them be your protection! 39 “‘See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive;**

**I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.**

Philippians 2:5–11;

**Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

Luke 19:28-40

**And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. 29When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, 30saying, “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. 31If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’ ” 32So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. 33And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” 35And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. 37As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, 38saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” 39And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” 40He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”**

Rocks of Faith

Luke 19:28-40

I am told that in the military when someone makes a stupid mistake, he or she may be referred to as a rock. The moniker means that they think they’re stupid and a big waste of space.

I thought about this when I was reading about today’s Gospel. **"I tell you, if these ones were silent, the very stones would cry out."** Jesus is commenting here on the overwhelming joy erupting all around Him.  The Pharisees, the proverbial killjoys, don't like all this praise and jubilation being heaped on Jesus.  Not surprisingly, they voice their disapproval to Jesus.  "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples!  Shut these people up!" And that's when Jesus responds with, "I tell you, if these ones were silent, the very stones would cry out."

This was obviously such a no-brainer reason to celebrate, that Jesus says that if the disciples didn't cry out for joy, the lifeless, stupid, dead rocks in the streets would begin to cry out.  I guess this is Jesus' subtle way of telling the Pharisees that they are hard-hearted and unbelieving.

Before we get too down on these Pharisees, we need to examine what exactly is being celebrated here on this first Palm Sunday.  What are the disciples so stirred up and passionate about?  Normally we’d say “They’re celebrating Jesus coming. Jesus is coming. **Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"** And that is right, but what exactly is it about Jesus that they're celebrating?  The answer is found at the very end of verse 37: **"the whole multitude of disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen."**

Well it sounds to me like the crowds were rejoicing over all the great and miraculous works they had seen.  Not exactly the textbook definition of faith, is it?  You can almost hear what they're thinking.  "Here He comes.  Remember all that amazing, miraculous stuff He did in the past?  That's nothing compared to what's coming next!" They weren't praising God for the Word or the life-giving teachings of Jesus.  They weren't praising God because they understood that Jesus was actually processing to His gruesome and agonizing crucifixion to lay down His life as an all-atoning, liberating sacrifice for all mankind.  In fact, they didn't understand that blessed reality at all.  Rather, they were praising God for the unbelievable and mighty works they had witnessed; for the miracles; for the results.

Understand: I'm not saying that this crowd of disciples didn't have faith.  They just had an imperfect faith that didn't fully understand that God's plan and their plan didn't match up, nor could it.  In a way, these disciples were every bit a bunch of rocks as the Pharisees were when it came to understanding Christ and His mission of redemption and salvation.  These disciples, like the Pharisees, wanted a triumphant, earthly king who would give them triumph and victory and prosperity in the here and now.  Unfortunately, that wasn't how God's plan of salvation was drawn up.  Is it any surprise then that the events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday were so traumatic and devastating to this group of believers who had put their faith and trust into the mighty and powerful works of a now condemned and crucified man?  To say that their faith was rattled and questioned would be an understatement.

It’s interesting to note here that on that Good Friday, when all these disciples were silent the very stones did cry out for the joy of what was taking place on that crucifixion mount.  Christ declared **"It is finished,"** and the earth quaked and boulders split.  "Hosanna" that is, "save us now;" that cry first heard on Palm Sunday six days earlier, had come true.  Salvation was finished and completed.  Creation recognized the fact, and cried out the only way it could.

You know it's sad that we still often approach God and approach faith with the same Palm Sunday mindset as this group rock-headed disciples.  How many times have you seen people full of life and faith and "on fire for Jesus" when times are going good, end up falling away from church; falling away from Christ when pain and suffering enters into their lives?  Or by the same token, how many times have you seen people come to church when their life is in shambles, looking for a quick-fix, only to leave a short while later because "they weren't getting anything out of it?" They didn't see anything earth-shaking and life-changing.  They didn't win the lottery or get their job back or receive favorable test results. They might say, "Instead of a getting my problem fixed, after giving my time, talent, and treasure, all I got in return was more pain and suffering.  I'm outta here!" Because of the lack of expected mighty and powerful results, they didn't see a reason to stick around.

While we don't like to admit it or confess it, we too often praise and rejoice to God for His mighty good works in our life, and yet we're also the first ones to try and save ourselves and abandon ship and when suffering is on the agenda.  "Praise God from whom all blessings flow, except when it affects my checkbook, my job, my big plans, or my health."  Then it often sounds more like, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?  Maybe this whole 'church thing' is a big sham.  Maybe God is punishing me.  Maybe God doesn't love me."

You are probably thinking I am raining on today's parade! My brothers and sisters in Christ: You have absolutely every reason in heaven and earth to rejoice today, just as our Palm Sunday forefathers did so many centuries ago.  As 21st century disciples, we have an advantage over our Palm Sunday forefathers.  We know the whole redemption story.  We know the reason why Christ is processing into town on that donkey, processing to Calvary in the middle of all the palms, cloaks, and hosannas in our Gospel lesson today.  Our Lord processed into Jerusalem for a reason, to ransom His life for ours; to completely pay for all our sins.  Those first disciples didn't understand that.  They didn't look to that cross and see a truly mighty and powerful work being performed; so mighty and powerful that the rocks themselves cried out; so mighty and powerful that all of mankind was completely redeemed and reconciled to our heavenly Father through the crucifixion of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ.  They didn't see it.  Because of the absolutely free gift of faith, we can and we do.

More importantly, we know that Calvary was not the end of the story.  Christ completely conquered sin, death, and the devil; He didn't just settle the score!  The tomb could not hold the Lord of Life!  The joy of Palm Sunday still lives on in our very presence in Christ's Word and Sacraments.  Immanuel, God with us, is still keeping His Word, **"I am with you always to the very end of the age."** Our hosannas; our cries to "save us now" still faithfully ring out.  We still suffer in sin.  Our Lord still comes to us for us; for our sins, lowly and humble, coming in the simple forms of Word, water, bread and wine, humbly but mightily processing to us to bring us His victories over sin, death, and the devil.

Right here we see our heavenly Father has kept His promise to crush the head of the deadly serpent and deliver His people unto eternal life and salvation; perfectly fulfilled in the work and person of Jesus Christ.  This is the true reason for Palm Sunday joy.  This is the true reason for Palm Sunday happiness.  It's so simple that even rocks like me can understand and joyously respond to this blessed reality!

May this blessed joy be your blessed joy, and may He keep you ever-grounded and founded upon the solid rock of our salvation, Christ Jesus.  Amen