"Sticks and Stones" A sermon for Palm Sunday, based on Psalm 118:1-2;19-29; Philippians 2:5-11; and Luke 19:28-40 delivered on April 6, 2025 by Rev. Alison Andrea Young at the First Congregational Church UCC of Onekama, Michigan.

(Our Theme throughout Lent will be the Lord’s Prayer. Today we explore the words: “**Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread. . .”)**

"Sticks and Stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me" . . this is the chant of children on the playground, a chant meant to self-comfort children who are being taunted by bullies or being called names by those who need to do that sort of thing in order to feel "better than" someone else. "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me" . . .is almost a chilling statement for Palm Sunday, for in the case of Palm Sunday in the stark face of the reality of what we now call Holy Week—the chant become a mockery—because it did not hold true!!!

Jesus comes into Jerusalem—almost a comical sight, reminding us of Don Quixote, a grown man riding a donkey's colt, his long legs dangling almost to the ground. The little donkey skittery and frightened, walking slowly. And the man's followers cheered. Shouts echoed down the hill, across the valley and up towards the city gates. People stopped to stare. The hillside became alive with joy. Jesus triumphant presence in Jerusalem gave the people “this day.” A day of rejoicing, a day of hope. In the Lord’s Prayer we say “give us this day” and this was quite a day that he gave the people! The hillsides were so noisy that even Jesus himself had to remark that, "If these were silent, the stones would shout out!” A dramatic statement indeed! Voices rang out—they called him names—they called him “King” and “Blessed”--they praised God joyfully—and called Jesus names. They recited words that they knew so well from the Psalms—in particular from Psalm 118 v. 26 saying "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!". And they shout “Hosanna” which in Hebrew means “save us.” Remembering the psalmist’s words in vv. 21-23: “I thank you that you have answered me and have

become my salvation, the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone; this is the Lord’s doing; Save us we beseech you, O Lord!” “Hosanna!” We remember, as we contemplate this analogy that it was the devil, trying to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, who placed stones before him and urged him to turn those stones into bread (Matthew 4:3), and that our focus part of the Lord’s Prayer also speaks to this when it says “Give Us this Day Our Daily Bread.” The bread of life and not the devil’s idea of bread,” Save us, O Lord,” we say and give us today the true bread!

They called him names—and those names caused him to be hurt—indeed, those names caused him to later lose his life on the cross. As an innocent children’s chant "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me"—may work — but for Jesus, it would have been an ironically deadly chant.

For was it not the very fact of the names that his followers were calling Jesus that later in the week so incensed Pilate and Herod?! The people were calling out as he passed: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” They were calling him “King!” To representatives of the emperor of Rome, that would be blasphemous. A death sentence.

Don't we read in Luke 23:3 "Then Pilate asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ He answered ‘You say so.’” and this insistence on Jesus' part--to not set things straight— on not denying that he was "The King of the Jews"—not denying the names he had been called caused the Roman government to crucify him! "Sticks and Stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Is a saying that is turned topsy-turvy by Jesus' Holy Week experience.

The Pharisees knew all of this. They knew the name calling was powerful.

They asked Jesus to make the disciples stop the chants, for it made these lawyers uncomfortable. No one should be called the Messiah—the savior of the world—the anointed one of God—except the one that THEY recognized as such. These were the Pharisees—the keepers of the law at all costs. They were not trying to protect Jesus; they were just trying to protect the letter of the law and themselves. They said "Rabbi, order your disciples to stop." And Jesus answered, " I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." The stone that the builders rejected, has indeed become the cornerstone” of the crowd’s salvation, as Psalm 118 reminds us!

"Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Is a travesty of a statement for Palm Sunday and Good Friday—a statement that is put to mockery by the events of most of Holy Week—BUT—in the end (long pause) it is the truth, isn’t it? A truth redeemed on Easter Morning. For when the stone is rolled away—when Jesus' name is whispered again by the women at the tomb—-he is indeed past being hurt by anything--past being broken by the cross, past being reviled, past being mocked and abused with lash and stones and words—past even death.

As the Apostle Paul reminds us in our Philippians passage for today—in the form of a hymn which deals with this very humility of Christ - for though Christ Jesus "was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave, being born

in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that was above very name/ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend/ in heaven and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, . . .” (vv. 6-11b)

The Palm Sunday parade was punctuated with just such name calling—"Hosanna, Hosanna" they said—"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." They said, "He is the King of Glory"—they said—and he was killed for those names—"Sticks and stones **will** break his bones” " —but that is not the end of the story. So, stay-tuned, for this story of Jesus is to be continued throughout next week on Maundy Thursday, where we will receive the remembrance of the first giving of our daily bread—our true spiritual bread while we commemorate the Last Supper; and through Good Friday and Holy Saturday to a place on Easter morning, where "names will never hurt him”—ever again! Amen.

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