

Can Jesus Get a Witness?

Luke 22:28-40

Scholars tell us that in the span of Jesus' lifetime, there were sixty different rebellions in Israel; Jews attempting to throw off the yoke of Roman domination. None of them was successful, of course. Roman soldiers squashed every one of those sixty rebellions. But you can understand why the Roman authorities in Jerusalem were a little jumpy when they heard talk of rebellion or insurrection, and certainly one of the words they were listening for was the word "king." It was kind of like saying "bomb" in an airport these days. All kinds of ears prick up and heavy-handed reaction follows.

The Jewish leaders of Jesus' day were in power because they had worked out a deal with the Romans to help keep the peace. They would go along with Rome's control of their country, and, in return, Rome would allow them to have their positions of wealth and power in Israel. Their job was to keep the peace, and if they didn't keep the peace, they lost their wealth and power. So, you can also understand why they were just as jumpy about certain words as the Romans were. Certain words set off all sorts of alarms, and one of those was the word "king."

So, it is easy to understand the Pharisees' quick response as Jesus rides the donkey into town and his disciples shout, "Blessed is the *king* who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Teacher, order your disciples to stop." Tell them to shut up, to put it in plain English. They're disturbing this fragile semblance of peace we've got worked out with Rome. If they keep calling you king, soldiers will be all over this place. You'll be in jail, or worse, and we'll be looking for new jobs. Tell them to quit calling you king.

Jesus answers, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would shout out."

Why does Jesus make such a wild claim? Because the disciples who call him "king" are telling the truth. Jesus is king, ruler of all heaven and earth. His is the name that is above every other name; the king of kings and lord of lords. At the name of King Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. The disciples' calling Jesus king is truer than they know, and if they don't say it, the very rocks and stones will shout it.

Somebody is going to witness to Jesus' lordship over the entire creation, both the physical plane of existence and the spiritual plane of existence. The words of Philippians and the words of Luke attest to the fact that Jesus is going to get a witness to his lordship. Either his disciples are going to do it, or creation will do it.

Can Jesus get a witness? Yes, he can. Every time I think of Jesus' words about stones singing and shouting, I can't help but think of the stones on the exterior of this building, and I believe they shout, too. Last Saturday and Sunday night, I believe the whole building was shouting that Jesus is king. If you were there, I believe you know what I mean. Using gifts and talents I'm not sure some of them even knew they had, they taught us the parables of Jesus, they witnessed to his death and resurrection. When they began to sing, "Long live God" at the end of the musical, that was royal language. When a king was crowned, crowds would shout, "Long live the king!" Not only were they witnessing to the resurrection, they were proclaiming Jesus' kingship. Jesus got a witness last weekend in our youth's presentation of Godspell.

A few years ago we lost our contract with the radio station that broadcast our 11:00 worship. The radio station thought they could make more money in that hour by playing music and selling commercials. They didn't know that the economy was about to head south and businesses would be cutting back on advertising. Last year they called us and offered us that time back, but our own budget did not allow us to say yes. When they heard about the youth presentation of Godspell, a group of women in our Presbyterian Women's organization had an idea. These were pretty much newer members of the church and of PW, and they had a fresh idea. Why not try to raise money to put our worship service back on the radio? They said that the community needs to hear, many want to hear, and miss hearing Jesus' lordship being proclaimed here, and in one evening, after expenses, they raised \$5,000, enough to pay for 33 weeks of sharing the Good News with our neighbors. They didn't ask me to say this, but I think there are some folks in this room who could help make that a full year.

When I hear that kind of enthusiasm for sharing the good news, it seems to me that the very stones of this building are shouting out that Jesus is king.

When I hear of Stephen Ministers giving of their time every week to sit with folks going through tough times, to embody Jesus' presence, to share Jesus' love, to walk through life's valleys with others, it is as though the stones of this church sing along with the Stephen Ministers that Jesus is king.

When I hear of folks giving up a good night's sleep so that homeless families can stay here through Interfaith Hospitality Network, I think of Jesus' words, "I was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, and you welcomed me," and I hear the very stones of this church shouting.

I could go on because there are a lot of ways you are shouting that Jesus is king by the way you are living your life, by the way you are giving yourself to others, by the way you are living the faith you claim.

Still. Still, before we get sore from patting each other on the back for being such great shouters, I also ask you to consider ways we may be leaving it to the stones to shout. Are there times and situations where we become strangely silent? Are there times and situations where we seem more like the Pharisees than the disciples...times when we seem to have made a deal with the worldly powers not to upset the delicate balance, the fragile peace?

I read recently that, "Those who have a stake in the status quo and the present order always try to keep things quiet."¹ Those of us who live pretty well in the present order of things always need to be aware of our tendency not to want change, just like the Pharisees. In a world that says, "Cash is king," we who have a fair amount of cash need to be careful about our tendency try to strike a delicate balance between keeping the cash and still calling Jesus king.

We live in a culture that is increasingly diverse. People of an amazing number of nationalities and languages, and religions all live together in our town and nation, and we need to get along with each other. We need to respect each other's religion because our history is filled with atrocities we Christians have performed on non-Christians. We see today the results of religious intolerance in the acts of terrorist extremists. But, in the interest of getting along, accepting diversity, respecting others' religions, we often let the stones shout that Jesus is Lord. We don't want to offend anyone of another faith, so we remain silent, Pharisees afraid of upsetting the delicate balance of power, afraid of losing the fragile peace. We're afraid to say that all religions are not equally valid pathways to God. We're afraid to say that Jesus is king.

Can Jesus get a witness? You bet he can, and you bet he will. In Luke's account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, it is not the crowds lining the street that call Jesus king. It is Jesus' disciples who witness to his kingship. There are a lot of ways in which you are doing the same, as though the people and the stones in this church were joining together to proclaim the true identity of Jesus Christ. But, may we always be on the lookout for the times and ways in which we stay silent and leave it to the stones to be Jesus' witnesses.

Amen.

¹ Willimon, William H., "Pulpit Resource" Volume 38.1, Jan.-March, 2010.