



2537 Lee Road
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118-4136
Telephone: 216-321-8880
Website: www.COTSumc.org

“Shouting and Silence”

April 13, 2025 – Palm Sunday

Luke 19:37-40 (CEB)
Luke 23:13-25 (NRSVUE)
Rev. Andy Call, Lead Pastor

Luke 19:37-40 (CEB)

³⁷ As Jesus approached the road leading down from the Mount of Olives, the whole throng of his disciples began rejoicing. They praised God with a loud voice because of all the mighty things they had seen.

³⁸ They said,

“Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord.
Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heavens.”

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, scold your disciples! Tell them to stop!”

⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout.”

Luke 23:13-25 (NRSVUE)

¹³ Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people ¹⁴ and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people, and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ I will therefore have him flogged and release him.”

¹⁸ Then they all shouted out together, “Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!” ¹⁹ (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city and for murder.) ²⁰ Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, ²¹ but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” ²² A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.” ²³ But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified, and their voices prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. ²⁵ He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

We do not know if they were the same people.

The crowd that gathered on the day Jesus entered Jerusalem were overcome with joy as they shouted, “Blessings on the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” The crowd that gathered in the same city just five days later was overcome with spite as they shouted, “Crucify him!”

There is no way to know for certain how many of the Palm Sunday admirers became Good Friday accusers. But Luke’s account suggests that there were at least some. “Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, *and the people*.” That would be pretty much everyone, at least of those who were near the praetorium where Pilate held court. And just a few verses later he reports that “They *all* shouted out together.” (emphasis mine)

What kind of environment would foster such a complete reversal of public opinion? During the Festival of Passover, the population of Jerusalem would have swelled from around 25,000 to a few hundred thousand. There were faithful Jews from throughout Judea and Galilee, pilgrims from the Jewish diaspora throughout the Mediterranean region, and merchants making the most of the crowds and the demand for food and other goods. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, would also have been in the city with a large contingent of soldiers for the purpose of maintaining “law and order.” The overcrowded city, the religious festival, and the increased military presence heightened both the energy and the anxiety of the people. It was a city buzzing with excitement, prone to the emotional swings of populism.

Jesus also was a polarizing figure. Word of his teaching and miracles had gotten around. For many people in Jerusalem, this was their first look at the man they had heard so much about. For others, he was relatively unknown; all they knew of Jesus is what they heard from the people around him. The buzz surrounding his arrival is understandable, whether from anticipation of what he would do or just curiosity for what all the fuss was about.

But Jesus also sparked controversy. He drew unwanted attention in a charged political atmosphere. He disrupted commerce in and around the Temple. He levied criticism at the Pharisees. He provoked discomfort through his teaching. Matthew and Mark tell us that the chief priests and the elders conspired to turn the people against Jesus. Luke doesn't name any conspiracy; in his telling, the people turned against him all on their own.

Perhaps the people shouting on Palm Sunday were different people than those who shouted on Good Friday. Or perhaps there were *some* who joined in, but only a few who cheered one day and condemned the next. Imagine for a moment that you were there. Without the benefit of perspective, would you have joined in the shouting? Would you have offered adulation for this man from Nazareth people were hailing as a king? Would you have participated in the bloodlust that demanded the public execution of a heretic?

There are times when we just need to shout, either in joy or grief or frustration. There was such rejoicing the day Jesus entered Jerusalem that he insisted that if his

disciples were silent, the stones themselves would shout. We've had some good reasons to shout lately. The Ohio State football team won the national championship in January. March Madness just ended for college basketball, with the men's tournament providing some of the best finishes in the Final Four in years and UConn completing a storybook run in the women's tournament. The Cavaliers will enter the NBA playoffs as the number one seed. Baseball is back, as the Guardians opened their home season earlier this week. (Some of you who were there may have been shouting just to keep warm!) And with the close of the school year just around the corner, there will be end-of-year celebrations, graduations, and joy as the summer holiday commences.

But there is also a time for silence. We need silence to give us space to reflect on our lives and our experiences. Being silent helps us to pay attention to what is going on around us. Have you ever gone for a quiet walk in the woods and discovered how many sounds you had never noticed before? When we fill our days with speaking and music and busyness, we miss many of life's simpler things – the sound of the leaves rustling in the breeze, the song of birds high in the trees, the rippling of a stream, a scampering rodent among the underbrush.

Our minds function much the same way. When we constantly busy ourselves with planning our activities or replaying conversations in our heads, we don't leave much space for listening – for new ideas, to practice creativity, to respond to our

bodies' needs. We can also miss what God may be trying to say to us. Practicing silence keeps us open and centered.

There is an awful lot of shouting in our world right now, from criticizing those who don't conform to our standards or who are different from us to protesting against government policies, exploitation, and violence. From cable news to social media, a great deal of time is spent shouting down perceived opponents. Much less time is spent listening; even when someone else is speaking, we are more likely to be thinking of how we are going to respond than genuinely listening to what they are saying.

This kind of reactivity can lead to an endless cycle. You say something that I don't like, so I get angry. My response makes you angry, and you fire back. Each subsequent reaction heightens the tone to the point where not only are we *not* listening to one another; we can't even stand to be in each other's presence. Reactivity creates an environment where we are constantly on edge, vigilant to the point of obsession. That affects our heart rate, our metabolism, our sleep cycle, and our mental and emotional well-being.

Is it just me, or does this problem seem to be getting worse? It takes so little to set us off in our present climate. Case in point: on my writing day this week, I made the mistake of perusing my Facebook news feed at lunchtime. One of the first things that popped up was an incendiary post that was so blatantly untrue that I was shocked anyone would believe it, let alone repost it. Without even thinking, I began searching

for data I could use to refute the outrageous claims. Before I realized, I had spent more than fifteen minutes crafting a reasoned response that would have little or no impact on anyone, especially the person who made the original post, if it was read at all. Who *did* it impact? Me. I wasted valuable time and accomplished nothing other than getting angry and losing my focus. (I deleted my comment.)

Distraction is often part of the point. While we are busy being outraged, writing letters, organizing protests, there are other actions, some of them much more dangerous, that go unnoticed. Much of the assault we are seeing now on civil liberties, immigration, and social programs is utilizing the extremist playbook of “flooding the zone.” The unprecedented number of executive actions, legal challenges, and public statements is designed to overwhelm opponents and leave them too exhausted to fight back. Some efforts will be challenged and defeated, but others will slip through. In order to be faithful advocates for justice, we have to pace ourselves. We must choose when to react and how to react in our effort to resist the slide into authoritarianism.

Even when our cause is just, our position principled, there is a time for shouting and a time for silence. As people of faith, we are called to stand up for justice and to stand with the vulnerable and oppressed. But we cannot leap from action to action without rest and reflection. Jesus himself took time apart to pray, to be silent, to prepare for what was to come. If we are constantly in a state of protest and action, we leave no space to listen, no opportunity to learn.

The next time you find yourself in a shouting match, whether that's literal, on social media, or just in your own head, stop to ask yourself, "Am I actually accomplishing anything? Am I responding or just reacting? Is my attitude preventing me from seeing things as clearly as I might? Are my words or actions making a difference, or are they just increasing the alienation I feel?" It takes wisdom to know when our voice is needed and when it is just noise.

We are living in an incredibly divisive time. It may not be the most divisive time in history, but we are more divided now than at any other point in my lifetime and probably yours, as well. When we pull away from each other, we stop listening. We align ourselves with like-minded friends, follow networks or publications skewed to a particular perspective, and regurgitate arguments that sound righteous to our ears but don't actually lead to greater understanding or better living. We practice a form of tribalism wherein our "side" is always "right," and the other "side" is always "wrong."

In 2008, researchers at Leeds University studied what is commonly known as "herd mentality," the tendency of people in groups to follow others instead of making independent decisions. In their experiments, they discovered that it takes as little as 5% of a crowd to sway the entire group.¹ Before long, everyone moves in the same direction, though only a few know why. Like sheep in a pasture, we are swayed by the

¹ <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/02/080214114517.htm>

movement of those in our “herd” and surrender our own agency and rationality in exchange for groupthink.

In the last week of Jesus’s life, the crowd quickly shifted their loyalty. In just a few short days, shouts of “Hosanna!” turned to shouts of “Crucify!” Herd mentality may have been at play in both instances – bandwagon fans on Sunday and a riotous mob on Friday. It seems likely that there were many in the crowd who didn’t fully understand what was going on. They might not have had a strong opinion about Jesus or Barabbas or about any of it. But the passionate shouting and the energy of the crowd swayed them, with terrible consequences for Jesus and his followers. In an instant, Jesus went from nearly being declared king to a despised criminal executed by the state.

I declared recently from this pulpit that outrage is not a Christian virtue. Given what is happening in the world right now, that statement warrants some explanation. Though there are certainly many reasons to be outraged at what is taking place around us, even when coming from a deep conviction of faith and justice, simply being outraged does little to move the needle. It can also lead us into a posture of self-righteousness. If our hearts are moved to the point of anger or indignation, there may be good reason for that. But too many of us get stuck there, using social media or op-ed columns or just everyday interactions to let everyone know how outraged we are at the situation as we see it. But faith is about more than outrage. It is about hope. It is about seeing the world as it is but also seeing a vision of what the world could yet be.

It is about seeing everyone as a beloved child of God and helping them to see that, too. It is about building relationships across lines of difference. It is about rolling up our sleeves and getting our hands dirty to help this world more closely reflect the reign of God Jesus imagined. Even when it feels good to vent frustration in solidarity with like-minded people, we cannot abdicate our responsibility to reflect, to think for ourselves, to weigh our words and our responses before acting on them.

Oh, how easily the crowd was swayed that week in Jerusalem. Those who rejoiced at Jesus's arrival soon demanded his death. That is more than a tragic story of what happened once long ago. It is the story of what humans do when we get swept up in emotion. There is a time for shouting and a time for silence...and everything in between. Like Jesus, we need to find the balance between action and contemplation, between speaking and listening. If we fail to do that, we could find ourselves on the wrong side of history... or the wrong side of God.