

If Stones Could Talk

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Several years ago Gary Chapman came out with a book that restarted a conversation between thousands and thousands of couples on the question of how best can we love each other. How best can we love each other? It was a book called *The Five Love Languages*. In the book Chapman posits that human beings express and receive love through five primary love languages. We do it usually without thinking about it and much of it has to do with how we are hardwired as personalities. The five love languages by which we express and receive love are: First, **Words of Affirmation** – “I love you. You look beautiful today. I love how you laugh.” Encouraging and complimentary words that affirm our partner. Second, **Quality Time** – spending long stretches of uninterrupted time with our partner. A long walk. Going out to dinner. A picnic. Third, **Receiving Gifts** – giving concrete gifts to symbolize our love to our partner – bringing home flowers, a diamond ring, an item of clothing, tickets to the football game. Fourth, **Acts of Service** – doing concrete things that serve our partner – cook the meal, mow the grass, clean the house. And finally **Physical Touch** – holding hands, hugging, love making, shoulder rubbing and other physical acts of intimacy. Chapman suggests, that for each of us one of these love languages we use as a natural means of expressing love and one of them tends to be our natural means by which someone can best communicate their love to us. Sometimes they are the same, but sometimes they are different. In other words we could have a language by which we primarily express love – and a different

language by which we receive love. For example, it may feel most natural to you to express your love to your significant other by performing chores, running errands, taking care of the house, in other words by acts of service – but the way your significant other can best love you is by giving you a hug, sitting next to you on the couch, holding your hand – physical touch.

Same love -- but expressed in different ways. Like the story of the man who used to make breakfast for he and his wife and one morning he put before her a piece of toast and she looks at the toast and she sees that it's the heel of the loaf. And she says to him, "You gave me the heel of loaf. You always give me the heel of the loaf. For thirty five years we've been married and whenever the heel of the loaf comes up, you give it to me. I hate the heel of the loaf. Why do you always give me the heel of the loaf?" To which he replies, "Because that's my favorite part." Good news, bad news story right? He was doing his best to love her, but he was just doing it the wrong way. Same love - but expressed differently.

So these past several weeks we have been imagining the love languages of God in our focus on the Apostles' Creed. Noting first the good news that God loves us in different ways. That God in three persons expresses love that at the very least is experienced by us in different ways – God loves us in God's creation – creating the universe and human beings in his image and giving us the joy of being co-creators. God loves us through the Holy Spirit who fills us and empowers us and guides us to carry out the mission of the kingdom. And God loves us in Christ who humbles himself, taking the form of a servant, becoming obedient unto death. Same love expressed in different ways. Now in each of these expressions God is making his move towards us. The tri-fold personality of God is expressed through active pursuit. God doesn't wait for us to come to him – God comes to us. The Apostles' Creed is all about God's movement toward us. The language of God is a language of active pursuit. No passivity here. God is on the move. God creates. God redeems. God sustains.

And there may be no better illustration of God on the move than the Palm Sunday story – Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. God is on the move. Despite the forecast of danger. Despite the assurances (even in his own mind) that things will not go well. Despite the pushback of the important people – Jesus arranges to make his ride into the city. Not that he wasn't warned. Not that they

didn't try to convince him that now might be a good time take a vacation. Not that the disciples didn't try to talk him out of it. Jesus is on the move. Because there is one thing still left to do. The Lamb of God must take away the sins of the world. The forgiveness of sins.

Now no one quite understands this. Jerusalem, for the most part, doesn't even know it has sins to be taken away. Jesus for most is just the rabbi of the moment who seems to have garnered a following up in the back hills of Gallilee. He's the teacher of the hour who's claiming his fifteen minutes of fame. But something big is happening. Something worldly. Something of cosmic proportion. The Lamb of God is being delivered to the temple. The sins of the world are being atoned for.

And when the Pharisees in the crowd try to tamp down the exuberance – try to settle the crowd – try to manage the event – Jesus says, “Oh you have no idea. You have no idea what is happening here. This is bigger than you. This is bigger than them. This is an event of universal proportion. Even if you managed to silence these palm waving people – why then the stones would shout out.”

Why then the stones would shout out. You see God is on the move. And God's ride into the city, God's weeping over the city, God's cleansing the city – it is all his language of love. The Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world. And now what remains is what the world does in response. Why if the stones are bursting to give thanks – what words do we have to say? What tongues have we to offer? What language shall we borrow to thank thee dearest friend?

Many of you have looked ahead to notice that we are singing “Joy to the World” as our closing hymn. “Joy to the World” in April? Has the pastor lost his mind? It reminds me of the story that my father often told on himself. About the time when he was a seminarian and was invited to preach in the middle of July at a church down in the Monongahela Valley outside of Pittsburgh. It was a tiny little church and there were not many there to hear this seminarian preach on what was a particularly hot day. And so father preached to the small congregation all fanning themselves to keep from dying. At the end of the sermon my father was to announce the hymn --- there was no bulletin --- and when he looked down to his notes he had discovered that he forgot what hymn he

had told the organist to play --- so he made a classic rookie preacher mistake --- he picked a number out of his head and said, "We will sing now Hymn number 157." Momentarily proud that he had salvaged the moment he turned to be seated --- only to hear the organist begin playing, "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

This morning "Joy to the World" is no such momentary lapse. On this day when the Lord comes to us riding on a donkey. When God is on the move to forgive the sin of the world perhaps it is Isaac Watt's great hymn based on Psalm 98 that gives us the language we need on Palm Sunday. "Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king!" Watts reminds us that when the king comes ... it's not just human beings who respond ... but it is the whole universe that responds ... the whole cosmos!!! "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth" (the psalm it says); "break forth into joyous song and sing praises ... Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming ..."

Joy to the world," writes Watts, "the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king.

Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns. Let us our songs employ.

While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains, repeat the sounding joy."

Makes you want to sing, doesn't it?

Isn't that a wonderful picture? That when God comes to the world ... i.e. when Jesus comes riding into Jerusalem as a King ... it is the whole cosmos that responds --- it's every bit of creation that finds its language. Why even the stones would talk. So Luke, the stylist that he is, drops his little rhetorical hint that when the disciples parade into the city with Jesus - what is on their tongues, what are they singing? - "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace." Sound familiar. It's those angels - it's the chant of the angels when Jesus was born. And now it's those precious few followers

who take the language of heaven and make it their own. Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace.”

So when the Pharisees see this outburst of praise and joy and celebration --- the Pharisees who just don't get it --- tell Jesus that he better quiet them down ... they don't know what they are saying. “Oh, they know what they are saying,” Jesus replies --- “and if they didn't say it ... if they were silent, the stones would shout out.”

You see, there are some things that simply must be said. Do you know what I mean by that? There are some things that simply must be said. When you hit an errant golf ball toward a pack of golfers you must say, “Fore”. When you smell smoke and see flames you must yell fire. When someone gives you an extraordinary and expensive gift ... you had better say thank you. Some things simply must be said.

When the God of creation descends to earth and parades into the holy city it is just one of those things you must speak to. It's an event that invites response. Not because you have to, but because you need to out of sheer joy and wonder ... you must say, “Glory to God ... peace in heaven ... Blessed is the King!!!” Truth is, Jesus says, if you're going to be silent while God is on his move – why even the stones will shout out.

You've heard the story of the woman who was attending her son's football game? Her son was number 17. So right at the opening kick-off her son, #17, ran the opening kick-off back for a touchdown. And with that the mother jumped up to scream and in doing so knocked off the hat of the guy in front of her. The man looked back at her with a stare. Then a few minutes later her son, #17, intercepted a pass and ran it back for another touchdown --- and the mother stood and jumped as her boy raced down the sidelines. This time, however, she kneed the guy in the back. This time the stare was very dirty. Then a few minutes later #17 caught a pass and broke free and ran for another touchdown --- and the mother jumped again --- and half her soda flew onto the guy's back and down his neck. This time he turned around and said, “Lady!!” Oh, I'm sorry, she said, “It's just that I'm the mother of 17!” And to that he replied: “Lady, if I was the mother of 17 I'd be jumping and screaming all day!”

I've got good news. We're not mothers of 17! But we are children of God. And God has come. The king has arrived. Time to jump and scream all day! Glory to God in the highest. Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven. Joy to the world.