



making God's love visible in downtown Memphis

Every Stone Must Cry
Palm Sunday, Year C, Luke 19:28-40
April 10, 2022
The Rev. Paul McLain

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

One of the joys of being an uncle is being able to attend the plays, concerts, and recitals of my nieces and nephews, relishing in their performances, applauding for them, beaming over them with pride, hugging them, and then handing them back off to their parents to deal with the day-to-day messiness of their teenage lives. Monday night, we saw our nephew McLain perform in Brookhaven, Mississippi's Little Theatre production of "Beauty and the Beast."

The familiar story is that of an arrogant young prince, who refuses to aid a woman begging for help. He is transformed into a monstrous-looking beast and all his servants become inanimate objects. The only way for the Beast to break the spell is to love someone and receive love in return. He must accomplish this before the last petal falls from a rose under a glass.

He imprisoned Belle, a beautiful, bookish girl from the nearby village, in hopes that she may be the one to help him break the spell. There is a scene in which Belle shares that while she is beginning to like it in the castle after the changes the Beast had made in his life for her, she is worried about her aging father and longs to care for him. The Beast looks at the rose, almost down to its last petal, ponders for a minute, and then cries out to Belle, "Go! Go be with your father. Go!"

In seeing this depiction of selfless love in the darkness of a theatre where no one could see me, I must confess that I teared up for the first time in a long time. And I felt a little embarrassed that it happened, of all places, at a Disney musical. There was just something about the way this crying out from the seemingly stone heart of the Beast moved me, from the stone-ness in my own heart, to pour out tears.

In our first Gospel reading at the Liturgy of the Palms, after Jesus rides the colt into Jerusalem, his disciples praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power they had seen. The Pharisees tell Jesus to order them to stop. And this is a case where the poetry of the King James Version seems to better express the image Jesus wanted to convey, "And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

That image of a stone – a hard, cold inanimate object – pouring out that which makes us most human – uncontrollable tears – is the image that Jesus selects to begin his week of pouring out his passion. He was aware of this image from studying and reciting the Hebrew scriptures. The

prophet Habakkuk warns of what will happen when we build our houses and our lives on corruption: “Alas for you who get evil gain for your house, setting your nest on high to be safe from the reach of harm! You have devised shame for your house by cutting off many peoples; you have forfeited your life. The very stones will cry out from the wall.”

Perhaps Jesus is thinking about this image as he foretells the destruction of the temple. In the verse right after he tells the Pharisees about the stones crying out, he weeps over Jerusalem. Just as Jesus cries over the death of his friend Lazarus, he cries and cries out over the coming destruction of the city, where in a few days, he will meet his own excruciating death.

One of the verses from Psalm 95 that we have said often during our online Morning Prayer is: “Let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation.” Seeing God as our Rock is a comforting image, especially during these two-plus years of COVID. But, if we go too far with that image, we can come to see God the way Aristotle saw God as ‘the unmoved, first mover’ – a god who sets creation in motion and then steps aside.

This passion Gospel just read in parts reveals a different sort of God – the God who endures betrayal, incarceration, and torture, the God who is moved by and weeps over the plight of humanity. God is the Rock of our salvation, but God is also a Rock who weeps.

We get glimpses of this God moving and working through us – a parishioner going out of her way to take a Waffle Shop meal to a longtime volunteer who is now a shut-in, other parishioners offering their vacation home to Ukrainian refugees, a Beast releasing a girl to care for her aging father.

And, as we take the time to see these things and do these things, we get closer to the words of another prophet, Ezekiel, who conveys this promise from God: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

Before the lights came up at the theatre, I wiped away my tears, regained my composure, applauded the cast, especially my nephew, and gave him a big bear-hug. But that earlier image of the Beast’s release of Belle that moved me to tears has stayed with me all week.

My only criticism of the play is - what if the Beast had not changed back to a handsome prince at the end of the story? I believe Belle still would have loved him. His inner transformation was what she was seeking. What she really wanted to do was to awaken the divine spark she saw within him all along.

When Jesus weeps over Lazarus and over Jerusalem, his tears are not necessarily signs of his humanity. His tears are really the ultimate signs of his divinity. They pour out of the God who cares – the Rock who weeps. As we begin our walk with Jesus through Holy Week, each teardrop reminds us that every stone must cry. *Amen.*

