

ALTARED LIFE: Crying Rocks and Packed Tambourines

Luke 19:28-40

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Cara Harrington, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City MO

WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/altared-life-crying-rocks-and-packed-tambourines/

On Wednesday nights, our children have been learning about Moses and how God used him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. We have spent time learning about the different plagues....imagined the Nile River turning to blood....pictured frogs hopping everywhere.... rubbed our arms and made faces as we imagined the itchy boils on our skin. This past week, we learned about the final straw for Pharaoh.... about the most difficult plague of all...the death of the first born people and livestock...and the meaning of Passover.



One by one, each child took a turn marking the door frame with red paint to represent the blood of the lamb before entering the home to wait. As they painted a stripe on the doorframe they voiced prayers for protection for family members. They grew serious as we stopped and considered what that night must have been like as the Israelite families waited. They knew their lives were about to change and they were trusting that God would keep His promise to protect them.

God sent His message through Moses to the people to roast a lamb for their family. They were to paint the blood on the top and sides of the door frames. Then they were to roast and eat the meat but to make bread without yeast. They were to eat in haste with their cloaks tucked in their belts, their shoes on their feet, and their staffs in their hands. God would see the blood on the doorposts, and all who were inside those homes would be spared from the firstborns being killed.

Can you imagine the emotions they must have been experiencing as they followed out the instructions and tried to get some sleep that night? They knew something BIG was about to happen. God had already given them clear instructions that they would commemorate this night from here on out. They just didn't know what it was going to all look like.

Have you ever prayed about something and sensed God giving you direction and asking you to obey? You listened to His voice and jumped and then you had to wait.....not sure what it was all going to look like? And while you waited and continued to pray, you found yourself experiencing a lot of different emotions? I have. I am in another waiting chapter in my adoption process. Hoping. Waiting. Praying. Trying to not get bogged down by how this particular match request appears impossible on paper and yet believing with all of my heart that He has led me to request these two sisters, and reminding myself over and over, "But God..."

I imagine it was a little like that for the Israelites waiting that night. They had been praying and begging God to deliver them from the slavery they were experiencing. They had hoped over and over as Moses went before Pharaoh. And then were disappointed each time when Pharaoh said, "no" and God responded with a plague. What if Pharaoh said no again? What if he finally said yes? Where would God take them? What would the journey be like? Would it be dangerous? How would they survive? And then, they recalled how God had been faithful to them in the past....how they believed He was powerful....how He had led them to trust Moses. And they whispered with confidence, "But God..."

*In Exodus 12, we read: **Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you? Then tell them, 'It is a sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when He struck down the Egyptians. Then the people bowed down and worshiped. The Israelites did just what the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron.***

At midnight, the firstborns were killed across Egypt.....the people AND the firstborn livestock in Egypt. There was great wailing and mourning.....the Bible describes it as worse than had ever been and ever will be. But the Israelites were spared as God had promised. He had passed over the homes marked by the blood of the lamb.

Something BIG was happening, and there was a great sense of urgency. When I pack for a mission trip, I try to think through and pack for all of the possibilities that I or another team member might possibly encounter.... and usually end up packing too much. It was the middle of the night when Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Enough. Just leave." They didn't have time to waste.....They didn't know where they were headed. I think they probably sensed they wouldn't be coming back. They didn't have a haul truck or even a car. Whatever they took would have to be carried. What would you have grabbed?

God led the people out of Egypt. You may remember He didn't take them the shortest way but led them around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. Do you remember what happened next? Pharaoh changed his mind and summoned his armies and they took off in pursuit of the Israelites. They could see them getting closer and closer and now they were facing the Red Sea that was uncrossable. They cried out in fear.

Sometimes, we may be tempted to think that things will be smooth or easy if we step out in faith. But then the next crisis happens and we find ourselves longing for the familiarity of what we had before....at least we knew what to expect! That's what happened to the Israelites. God had just delivered them out of the very situation they had begged Him to save them from but now the Red Sea was in front of them. It seemed impossible. And they got scared and cried out, *"Did you just bring us out here to die? At least we knew what to expect before!"* This would not be the last time they would cry this out to God.

God split the Red Sea and they walked across the sea on dry land. And He closed the sea once the Israelites had made it safely to the other side, but the Egyptians were overcome by the waters. Wow....

Recently, I heard a speaker named Beth Guckenberger speak on this part of the story in a way that has stuck with me. She pointed to a verse in Exodus that reveals something Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, had packed and hung on to even as she walked through the Red Sea on dry land.

"Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea." Exodus 15:20-21

They had packed tambourines. Out of all of the things they could have packed and had to carry, they packed tambourines. Even in some of the most terrifying moments of their lives, they had packed what they needed to be ready to worship at a moment's notice.

If I had to flee in the middle of the night, I'm not sure I would have thought to grab a tambourine. But not only Miriam.....many of the women brought their tambourines! Friends, have we packed our tambourines? Are we prepared to worship our God at any given moment??

I believe we can worship in our joy AND in our lament....but I must admit, it's pretty tricky to weep in sorrow and play a tambourine at the same time!

God is the ultimate storyteller, and I'm constantly amazed at how He has woven details together to write His story. In the midst of preparing and teaching these familiar stories to share with the children, I have personally been reminded of the faithfulness of our God. As these stories have come to life for me all over again, I have been struck at how they tie so closely to this week....to Palm Sunday and this holy week that we are beginning today.

You see, it was because of this Passover that there were so many Jews coming to Jerusalem. They were following the early instructions to commemorate what God had done when He delivered them. It would have been common, if not expected, for Jewish men to travel to

Jerusalem every year to observe the Passover. As instructed, they continued to celebrate the Passover feast and observe a ceremony and remember how God had saved His people.

So there were crowds coming from all over coming to bring sacrifices and participate in this festival. Jesus had recently raised Lazarus from the dead, and as you can imagine this had gotten the attention of many people. The word got around that Jesus was in town, and people began to gather around him as He and they made their way to Jerusalem.

As they traveled, they no doubt were remembering and retelling what God had done. The stories of Passover and the miracle of parting the Red Sea would be fresh on their minds and lips. I imagine there were also a lot of conversations about the miracles that this man named Jesus had been doing. *Did you see what He did with Lazarus? The man was dead, but now he's alive. He's right over there! Look at me—I'm walking to Jerusalem this year!! I was paralyzed, but He healed me. I was blind, but now I see. This Jesus—He knows everything about me!* They sensed something BIG was happening, and excitement was in the air.

Jesus told a couple of his disciples to go into the next village where they would find a colt that had never been ridden. They were to untie the animal and bring it to Jesus. When asked what they were doing, they were to respond, "The Lord needs it."

When the disciples came back with the donkey, they put garments on top and Jesus sat on its back as they continued the entry into Jerusalem. Even this detail of riding in on a colt was a part of fulfilling prophecy from hundreds of years before.

All four gospels record what happened on this day. It was a big deal. People spread out their coats or garments on the road for the donkey carrying Jesus to step over. They took branches from the trees and waved them as they cried out in praise, "*Hosanna. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna!*" The waving of palm branches and the spreading of the garments on the road were a vivid act of welcoming royalty. It was rolling out the red carpet and acknowledging that there was indeed something very special about this Jesus.

The word "Hosanna" always makes me think of palm branches like the ones the children were waving a few minutes ago. It is always used in conjunction with an act of worship and praise. This week I have been doing some reading about the origin and meaning of this word. Merriam Webster dictionary defines it as "*used as a cry of acclamation and adoration*" It comes from a Hebrew word that means "Save us" I think both definitions apply in this story. They had been waiting for a Messiah.....they were starting to believe that Jesus was indeed Him. They wanted Him to save them. Though they likely didn't fully understand, these same people who were being reminded of how God had saved his people marked by the blood of the lamb were crying out for salvation that would require the blood of the Lamb of God to be shed for them in just a few days. But it was also a cry of praise.....and not just a little praise. Have you ever noticed that the punctuation that usually follows the word "hosanna" is an exclamation mark? This was not just a pat on the back, but this was a heartfelt cry of adoration and praise. If not

literally, the people had figuratively packed their tambourines and were ready to worship as Jesus made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem!

Well, not everyone was ready. Some of the religious leaders had left their tambourines AND palm branches at home. All of this made them very nervous and they called out to Jesus to rebuke the people.

Listen to these words from the Living Bible translations from the passage that Doug read earlier:

Then the crowds spread out their robes along the road ahead of him, and as they reached the place where the road started down from the Mount of Olives, the whole procession began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles Jesus had done. "God has given us a King!" they exulted. "Long live the King! Let all heaven rejoice! Glory to God in the highest heavens!"

But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, "Sir, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!"

He replied, "If they keep quiet, the stones along the road will burst into cheers!"

The King James version translates that last sentence this way, "***And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.***

The Message paraphrase says, "***But he said, "If they kept quiet, the stones would do it for them, shouting praise."***

If rocks and stones are crying out and shouting praise, how much more should we be ready to worship our Savior?! Hosanna!

In the moments when we hear His voice and we respond with joy and anticipation... Hosanna!

In the moments when we experience so much joy we could burst... Hosannah!

In the moments when our hearts ache... Hosanna!

In the moments when we face the Red Seas in life....when everything around us feels like it is closing in... Hosanna!

In the moments when we long for the familiar or the predictable... Hosanna!

In the moments when we are simply undone by the magnitude of the sacrifice Jesus paid for you and for me... Hosanna!

As we begin this Holy Week and reflect on all of the events that unfolded.... May we pack our tambourines and join the rocks and stones crying out "***Hosanna! Save us! Jesus – You. are. Worthy of our worship!"***