

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Luke 19:28-40

Sermon Title: "The World's Voice" (The Supporting Cast of Lent: The Rocks and Creation)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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One of my best vacations has been visiting the White Mountain of New Hampshire. My wife and I visited New Hampshire three years in a row with the sole purpose of hiking up mountains. Some of the summits we reached were over 3500 feet, and some were just over 4000 feet. It would take a bit of time to make our ways up the side of the mountains, with having to switch back and forth on the paths and to climb over long tree roots and loose rocks, and sweating what seemed gallons of water every ten minutes. But when we reached the tops, the views were spectacular. We stood above the pine trees and every thing else. Fluffy clouds floated toward a mountain and hid its peak, as though God was present there with Moses; and then the clouds vaporized on the other side, giving way to clear skies. There was hardly any noise: no busy noise like we humans love to make. Everything was peaceful and serene; and it all seemed to point to something greater than the beautiful scenery itself. The mountains and trees and clouds and solitary birds flying overhead seemed to worship God in their own ways, speaking

volumes about the vast splendor and size of God.

Jesus is riding on a donkey into the city of Jerusalem. People are coming from every building and street corner to greet him. They make a big fuss about his entry, waving palm branches, laying blankets on the dusty ground, shouting for this great Person to look their way.

The religious people don't like it one bit. Some of the Pharisees in the crowd think the people are making too much out of nothing. They might think Jesus is being a bit of a show-off by coming in on an animal amid such pomp and circumstance. "Rebuke your disciples," they say to Jesus. Tell them to stop this demonstration, and act more dignified. Jesus' response is quite famous – every Palm Sunday we read it, and may have committed to memory. "I tell you," Jesus says, "If they keep quiet, the very stones would cry out."

I think at this moment, Jesus is making fun of the Pharisees. Go ahead and make these people put away their palm branches and take up their blankets. Go ahead and stop these happy festivities. Because if you could – and there is no way you could make them shut up – but if you could, the very stones surrounding us would begin to speak. Those little pebbles at your feet and all the large stones that masons have carved to

make the nearby builds would find their voices and make such a racket. They probably would make a bigger racket than the crowd is making right now.

I think Jesus is having some fun out with the Pharisees, and we can be sure they don't like it. Not only would the stones fill the place with shouts of praises to God, but the other part of the joke is that creation itself is already praising God. All of creation is constantly giving honor and glory to God's great love and splendor, and creation is constantly pointing us to God, so that we might take notice.

Psalm 19 is "an awe-filled description of the cosmic self-revelation of God through his creative acts," as least in the first few verses.¹ The psalm is attributed to David, so it is no wonder that he may have been sitting outside in the field with his sheep to look after, and was acutely aware of the beauty of creation that surrounded him. "The heavens declare the glory of God," David said. "The firmament – the land – show God's handiwork." Creation is worshipping God, David noticed in the field one day, and many other days. Even time itself praises God, since David tells us that "day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge."

But how can the heavens and firmament worship

¹ Gerald H. Wilson, *The NIV Application Commentary: Psalms Volume 1*, 360.

God, if they are inanimate things? How can the days and nights praise God, when time doesn't have a voice? Obviously the creation around us is not saying in plain words, "Glory to God in the highest! Praise the name of the Lord!" David assures us that there is communication being shared, since there "is no speech nor language where their voice is heard." In other words, we who use verbal communication can hear what creation is saying, no matter what language we speak. English, Spanish, Chinese, German, French, Japanese – whatever the language, the world is speaking to us. It is telling us about God's great love and careful work day and night. Jesus was right: the very stones are crying out.

So what is the world telling us, we who have such complex forms of communication? Is our language complex enough to get what creation is saying?

Take a rainbow, for example. When we see one in the sky, no matter how many times we have seen one, we are always awestruck by it. We want to get outside and take pictures and scan the arcing shape from left to right, and try to find where the rainbow begins and ends. When we see a rainbow, we don't think about the legend of leprechauns and their pots of gold. We think almost immediately about God's covenant to Noah in Genesis 9. "I set my rainbow in the cloud,

and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between me and the earth,” the Lord says.² Never again will the waters flood the entire world, like they once did. God declares this promise to us every time a rainbow shows up.

When we see those rainbows, we realize God’s promises reach us in our disasters. When the floodwater of stress and anxiety rise against us, we know we can stand against them, because God promises to protect us. When situations get so difficult that we don’t know if we are going to sink or swim, we surrender ourselves to God’s care, and trust that he will give us the means to float, and even to travel through the difficulties. It may not be smooth sailing, but God will see us through, if we trust him, if we remember his promises just as God remembers them.

Thunderstorms are scary things, and we’ve had a few in the past weeks that have been humdingers. Even thunderstorms have something to say about God. We don’t think of God as all-powerful and mighty too often – we like to think of God being as meek and mild as Jesus most times – but thunderstorms remind us of how awesome God really is. If lightning strikes and heavy winds can tear down

² Genesis 9:13.

whole trees, then think of how powerful the hand of God is. Think of the strength that God has in one pinky to transform people's hearts and transform their circumstances. Think of the force God possesses to cause nations to bow down before him, and they will some day when Christ returns. Even God can make the storms become still. Even the heavy winds obey Jesus' voice.³ The Lord can quiet our distress. The Lord can provide answers to some of our most difficult problems. Just ask, and expect God to move through us like a thunderstorm can move across the trees and open fields.

I love watching NOVA on Public TV, because they will have episodes that discuss the farthest reaches of space. Telescopes are so powerful that we can view galaxies that are billions of light years away. We can see clouds nebula where stars are being born. The Orion Nebula can be found in the constellation Orion, in his belt in particular, and although it looks like a point in space to us, it is actually a nursery for stars that measures 30 light years across (that means it would take 30 years to cross it, if we traveled the speed of light). There are at least 2000 stars hovering in that nebula amid hydrogen gases and cosmic dust full of blues and purples and reds. Think about the

³ Cf. Psalm 107:28-30 and Luke 8:22-25.

massive size of our sun, and then imagine 2000 more suns joining it – this is what most nebulas look like. Scientists are amazed by what they can see going on in these giant nebula, and they should be, because even the nebula are praising God for his creative power. The birthing of stars means God has never stopped birthing new realities throughout the universe. God is always creating new possibilities for us, always showing us his ways to live in fresh and exciting ways. Just when we think we could do nothing else, God opens a door for another ministry for us to take on with joy and thanksgiving. Just when we think we are at the ends of our ropes, God takes us off the rope and places our feet on solid ground, and gives us more reasons to enjoy every day God creates for us.

When I hike around Atlanta, I see lots of granite – and I have placed some of that ancient granite on shelves in my office – and I think about God. Granite is hard and long-lasting, and so is God. God was before the beginning of time, which we can hardly imagine. God endures through every economic downturn, every global war, and every environmental shift. God endured for our ancestors before us, and God will endure for our children's children after us. The Lord made granite, and only God who is as tough as granite – and even more so – could create such a

beautiful and permanent rock.

I have visited many churches in my time. I have visited cathedrals in England and in the Philippines. I have visited churches made of stone or made of wood. I have been in churches that were 50 years old and over 500 years old. By entering these churches, I realize that they all speak. These structures of stone and wood tell an abundance of stories about the characteristics of God. Stone and marble cathedrals speak about the greatness and majesty of God, while a small country church made of wood speaks of the compassion of God. One church my wife and I visited was over 800 years old, and it was a simple yet stunning structure to enter. It is still a viable church today. That church reminds me of the steadfastness of God, of how God was with those people through thick and thin of whatever was happening 800 years ago. Those people had schedules and places to go and fears and problems, maybe similar to ours. Those people 800 years ago worshipped the same God we do, and they believed that no matter what their lot in life was, God always stood by them, always guided them, always loved them. God never forgets his people, but walks with every generation. God even walks with us in the Year 2011, and God will never stop guiding and loving us toward his kingdom in heaven.

“The heavens declare the glory of God,” David said,

and the firmament shows God's handiwork." "IF you could possibly shut these people up," Jesus said to the Pharisees, "the very stones would begin to praise God."

The tall trees point to the strength and endurance of God, while the fine grains of wood point to the complexities of God that are rich and compelling. Flowers in the backyard point to the beauty and delicacy of God, who cares for his children. The coming of night points to the mystery of God: just as the universe is too big for us to see, so is God too big for us to fully understand, and yet what we see of God, just as what we see of the night sky is awe-inspiring, and peaceful. The sun rising in the early morning points to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, making all things new again.

Creation has a voice, if we are willing to listen to it. It has many stories to tell us about the Creator of all things. If we listen to the stones, like the Pharisees should have, we would find they have an interesting tale to tell us, ones that will deepen our faith and love for God.

