



**Rev Helen Jacobi**  
**Silence**  
Year C Good Friday  
Luke 23:13-56  
15 April 2022

On Palm Sunday we heard the line “Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, order your disciples to stop.’ He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.’”

These words are only heard in Luke’s version of the gospel.

I said on Sunday that when I hear that line I think of the stones on the road, but Jesus is quoting the prophet Habakkuk (2:9-11)

*‘Alas for you who get evil gain for your houses,  
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,  
and the plaster will respond from the woodwork.*

the stones of the wall cry out in protest.

Like the haunting images on our TV screens of bombed out apartment buildings in Ukraine – the remaining stones cry out in witness to the atrocities

In Luke’s version of the trial and the crucifixion Jesus is often silent.

Silent before Pilate, silent before Herod.

He does not respond to his accusers.

If you think of paintings or films of Jesus before Pilate – you see the crowds shouting; the accusers accusing; Pilate usually in full flight trying to get answers from him but Jesus is silent.

It is as if he will not even acknowledge their questions and insults.

Where would he start?

And the crowds get louder and Luke says “their voices prevailed” (23:23).

Pilate releases Barabbas, a man accused of many crimes, and sends Jesus to be crucified.

In Luke's version Jesus is not dressed in a royal robe, nor in a crown of thorns; Luke does not seem to set him against the Roman rulers as an alternative king; and in fact says three times that Pilate finds him innocent.

Luke is a Gentile, writing for Gentile followers and keen perhaps to set the record straight (Luke 1:1-4) as he says in his opening lines of the gospel.

If Pilate found him innocent then there is no need for the Roman rulers, a generation later, to fear the Christians.

Sadly though this stress on Pilate finding Jesus innocent lays the blame back on the Jewish people for his death and has led through the centuries to much persecution of Jews by Christians.

When we hear both Pilate and the centurion declaring "this man was innocent" we also hear the beginnings of blame for those who therefore must have found him guilty – the Jewish leaders and their people.

Good Friday is also a day of repentance for centuries of persecution of those of Jewish faith.

Up to this point in the story Jesus is silent.

Then on his way to Golgotha, Jesus speaks.

Luke has Jesus speak four times; and all four utterances are found only in Luke.

Jesus speaks first to the women who are weeping on the side of the road – a long piece:

Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us"; and to the hills, "Cover us." For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry? Times are coming when women will wish they never had children and when they will wish for the mountains to fall so their suffering might end.

Women of the Ukraine; women of Russia might well have such a wish today.

Jesus offers no words of comfort or solace.

He speaks the truth of the desperation of his situation and that of his followers.

What hope can there be?

None.

But he is no longer silent.

The women weeping would have included his mother Mary, described in our GF poem, written by Dean Michael Weeder from Cape Town.

"your mother's fear .... that called your name from the edge of the crowd".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lockdown Love and Lament 2021 Michael Weeder

When I visited Cape Town way back in 2015 and first met Dean Michael, we visited the District Six museum which tells the story of the once vibrant multi racial community which was demolished between 1966 and 1982 by the apartheid government.

The staff and volunteers at the museum have painstakingly pieced together the history of the community.

There is a huge map on the floor of all the demolished streets.

It was only intended to be there at the opening of the museum but people began to write on it to record where they lived and so now it is protected with a covering and people can have their names added as the story is slowly pieced together.

They also have street signs – a bit old and battered – but the original signs which were saved by one of the workers tasked with bulldozing the houses.

He secretly kept them in his garage and brought them to the museum all those years later.

Rowan Williams says “Even where the winners have rewritten the history, where a language and a civilisation have been destroyed, what is suppressed and buried still so often returns. You think you have silenced the dissenting voice, but your own words carry the tell-tale trace of what you have tried to deny. The buried truth finds its way in from the margins, laps against the shore of the winner’s version.”<sup>2</sup>

So may it be for Ukraine, their voices will not be silenced, their streets and their stones and their stories will cry out.

Jesus on the road to Golgotha laments, and his words take over from the “winner’s” version – Jesus’ words do not tell a story of hope, but they tell the truth.

Then at the cross Jesus speaks again “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

This is also only found in Luke.

Forgiveness is a strong theme in Luke’s gospel – the prodigal son which we read in Lent, is his story.

We hear from a compassionate Jesus.

This seems like a quiet voice amongst the mocking and the yelling.

It is the same when he speaks a third time:

one of the criminals crucified with him derides him, the other speaks words which have become a prayer for millions down the ages “Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom”.

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<sup>2</sup> “Buried Truth” in Darkness Yielding ed Jim Cotter p274

A personal quiet plea for a future that might be.

And the reply: "today you will be with me in paradise."

The word paradise originally meant garden, the same word being used for the garden of Eden.

Forgiveness and paradise, not at all what we expect to hear from Jesus, at this time, the worst of times.

And yet we know in our own lives that in the worst of times reaching for forgiveness is a path to healing;

and the love and compassion of others can feel like a lush garden in the parched reality of our suffering.

We too can name suffering, call it out; and we too can offer forgiveness.

Jesus' final words are not to those around him but to God, whom he names as father. He prays the words of psalm 31: (3-5)

*You are indeed my rock and my fortress;  
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,  
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,  
for you are my refuge.*

*Into your hand I commit my spirit;  
you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.*

While only one line is recorded "Father, into your hand I commend my spirit", the sentiment of psalm 31 describing God as a rock and a refuge, is behind these words.

Luke's Jesus does not feel abandoned, and he is not silent.

In Lent we traced a thread of healing through our Sunday readings and the same thread is here in the account of the crucifixion

Jesus laments the suffering that has been and is to come;

he speaks personal words of compassion and forgiveness,

calling the "repentant thief" home, like the prodigal son.

He has already been anointed for burial and so Jesus relies on God, his rock and refuge to get him through the last of it.

As we stand before this cross today, in our time and our place, we are invited to do the same.

Lament; repent; forgive; return home; and be anointed with hope.

If we cannot, if we are silent – the stones will speak for us.