**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

 **“The Stones Would Cry”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

First Sunday in Advent, December 1, 2024

*Luke 19: 28-40*

Change is hard. Most of us don’t like it very much. We want everything to more or less stay the same as it has always been. We don’t want a new job, we don’t want to get old, we don’t want to move, we don’t want our property taxes to go up; we don’t want change. Try as hard as we might, change is still going to happen.

Wherever Jesus went, He brought change with Him. His very presence alone often brought change. Wherever Jesus traveled to in the Gospels, change happens; things that have been resting are stirred up. We see that just the presence of Christ alone was enough to stir up demons. In most of His interactions with them, they are the ones who initiate conflict with Him. They throw their hosts to the ground before Him, they scream out at Him, they beg Him to let them enter into a herd of pigs and die just to get away from Him. The people who owned the pigs certainly were not fans of change; they beg Jesus to leave. Evil cannot stand the presence of Christ.

Sickness and disease, too, cannot remain where Christ is. A woman touches His cloak, a man asks Jesus to give a command, a friend is lowered through a roof; a word, a touch, a command is all that Jesus needs to change something or someone. He even curses a fig tree and stops it from growing fruit ever again with just a word.

Jesus comes and He challenges the entire religious system of the time. He debates the Pharisees and challenges the Scribes. Even the High Priests are not safe from His criticism. Their faith has become stagnant and diseased instead of the living and active faith they were called to. Jesus comes and disrupts the system that they had set up, the system that they believed would earn them God’s favor.

It seems funny, perhaps, to start Advent out with the same reading we use to start Holy Week. But Jesus’ birth, Advent, and Christmas in general must and can never be divorced from the events of Holy Week. Without Holy Week, without Good Friday, Christmas means nothing to us.

Jesus’ less than triumphant entry into this world, in a lowly stable in the tiny town of Bethlehem, is a similar one to His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. It was in a humble place, but the crowds shouting for Him were far greater. A great multitude of angels appears to the shepherds and disrupts their normal routines. The monotony of their lives is changed, and they are the first to meet God incarnate.

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem by human standards seems more triumphant, however, only His disciples were singing His praises. Whether it is the twelve or hundreds more, we are not sure, but it is no multitude of angels. It was no glorious band of angels, but it was enough to anger the Pharisees. They were there watching the crowds enter Jerusalem for the Passover. I’m sure they were there to enforce the traditions of the elders; they were there to protect the religious system they had built.

Jesus and His disciple arrive on the scene, and turmoil ensues. Jesus has just raised Lazarus from the dead, and the crowds are following Him into the city. The people are shouting His praises, hailing Him as king. The concept of Israel having a king was important. The king was the Lord’s anointed, or in Hebrew, the Messiah. To call Jesus “king” was to reinforce everything that He had been teaching about the coming kingdom. Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, and the Pharisees were afraid of the change He would bring.

Perhaps they were afraid of Jesus taking their religious and social power or of Him angering the Romans and forcing them to lose the little political power that they had. Either way, change was coming, and there was nothing they could do about it. Wherever Jesus goes, change follows. Whether the Pharisees liked it or not, change was coming. It was time for change; it didn’t matter who they silenced, they could silence the disciples, they could silence the crowds, they could silence all of mankind and yet, still, change was going to come.

Jesus came to this world as a baby in His mother’s womb to change the world. He was born in a stable to change the world. He entered Jerusalem to change the world. He would allow Himself to be put on a cross to change the world.

As I said before, we don’t like change. But change is exactly what we desperately need. All of mankind needs change. Whether you believe it or not, we all see the flaws in ourselves. Whether physical or emotional, we all see the bits and pieces of us that we don’t like. Each person, if they really look inside themselves, can see that there is something not right.

The culture will give you competing solutions to this problem. Some will tell you that you can and should change whatever you don’t like about yourself, even if it’s your gender. Others will tell you that you need to love yourself exactly how you are, that you shouldn’t change anything, and that you definitely shouldn’t let anyone else tell you that something is wrong with you.

We need change. Christians also don’t like change. We don’t like to be told that doing something the way we have always done it is wrong. We don’t like to be told that the way we are living or the way that we speak to, or about, other people is wrong. We don’t want to change, but change is inevitable. Where Jesus is, change will happen. Jesus is an unstoppable force of change.

Jesus is an unstoppable force of change because He does not change; God does not change. The world changes, God stays the same. Where Jesus goes, the world changes around Him.

In your baptisms a great change happened. You went from a dead man, trapped in sin, to a new person alive in Christ. Your transformation is not complete. Christ is not done changing you. The Holy Spirit is active; He is not sleeping. Day by day, you are being transformed; you are being changed.

You can resist change; you can resist the Holy Spirit—many people do. “Church is nice and all, Pastor, but what does the Bible really have to do with my life?” Too many parents go to church on Sunday but otherwise live their life apart from Christ and are surprised when their kids don’t stay in the church. We think we have it all figured out. We think that we know exactly what to do, and we don’t need to change, and so we don’t grow. We resist the Holy Spirit when He convicts us with the Law, and eventually, our faith withers and dies.

We need change, and we need it desperately. The good news is that we don’t change ourselves. We don’t need to summon up enough strength, we don’t need to figure out the right plan, and we don’t need to hear the right sermon or the right advice. We need Jesus to change us, and He is more than willing to do it. All we need to do is let go, stop resisting, throw out all the excuses that keep us from church, from Bible study, from reading the Bible, and from letting Jesus change us.

You’re going to mess up; you’re not going to do it perfectly. You might even fail more often than you succeed, but you will grow. You can change. One day, we will be changed for good. One day, our struggle will be over. One day, we won’t need to worry about change. Christ will change us for good. The dead will be raised, sin and death will be gone. The reality of what Jesus earned for us on the cross will be seen, and our change will be complete.

In the name of Jesus, amen.