Those of you who were here last Sunday or who talked to anyone who was here last Sunday know about my big announcement, that I will be moving to Ogden, UT, in June. My new appointment at Ogden First United Methodist Church will begin July 1.

As I was flying into Salt Lake City a couple weeks ago for my introductory meeting there, I was thinking about the mountains that rise up so sharply from the Salt Lake Valley. Since I've never lived or spent much time in Utah, right now I have very few answers and lots of questions. Which came first, the valley or the mountains? What kind of natural forces pushed those rocks up into the air like that? How many earthquakes and tectonic shifts were required to loosen the layers of stone? Did all that happen over millions or billions of years? And has the movement of those rocks stopped now, or are the mountains still growing taller? Since we will be buying a house, I want to know, will the ground still be shifting? And then, of course, there are questions about erosion. How much have wind and water worn those hills away? And did all that salt in the lake come out of the rocks?

If rocks could talk, they'd have a lot to say. Think of rocks full of fossils, rocks that have layers of dinosaur-era oil and natural gas between them, rocks that have been blown out of volcanoes, rocks that have been washed down creeks and rivers, rocks that have been pushed by glaciers and avalanches--and how about those meteor rocks that have been thrown to the earth from some distant place in the galaxy? Or think about a sparkly cut and polished rock that is attached to a ring, and given by a guy to his favorite gal. Such a precious stone nearly shouts out the question, "Will you marry me?"
In today's Palm Sunday reading, we hear the Pharisees commanding Jesus to silence his disciples. Jesus' response was, "if his disciples "keep quiet, the stones will cry out." Let's consider this response. If the stones would cry out, what exactly would they say?

1. **JESUS IS BLESSED!**

If the stones would cry out, the first thing they would say is, "Jesus is blessed!" Like the people who were walking along the road with Jesus, the stones would be shouting out their praises to this one who was a new and different kind of king. They would be proclaiming that the kingdom of God was near. The stones would be telling all who would listen about the compassionate care of Jesus. They would boldly announce that Jesus was the one who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, offered movement to the paralyzed, and inspired hope in the discouraged. The stones would sing out about the kind and inclusive way Jesus spoke to women, children, the poor, and the oppressed. The rocks would proclaim Jesus' wise teachings. They would tell how he challenged those in authority, by pointing out their hypocrisy and holding them accountable. If the stones would cry out, they would tell that Jesus was not a violent military king. All he wanted was to connect people's hearts and minds to God. Jesus wanted to help his Hebrew people have a better life. Jesus wanted to show them the way of peace.

For all those reasons, the stones would cry out a message of praise and thanksgiving. Like the Palm Sunday crowd, the stones would be waving palm branches and laying their cloaks in the road. They would be hailing the king who comes in the name of the Lord. They would be shouting, "Jesus is blessed!"

2. **JESUS RESISTS TEMPTATION!**

If the stones would cry out, a second thing they might say is that Jesus resists temptation. You remember the story of Jesus' 40-day fast in the wilderness. He was out there by himself in
the desert for 40 days with nothing to eat. And what was his first temptation? To turn stones into bread. Surely the stones would remember that. They would remember and tell everyone that Jesus did not give in to that temptation. Despite his horrible hunger, he did not resort to using magic or divinity for his own advantage. Despite his suffering, Jesus didn't give in to Satan.

Instead, Jesus turned to the word of God for strength and nourishment. The stones would remember that Jesus had not eaten them. They would proclaim to all who would listen that Jesus was a survivor. He was an amazing super hero. Jesus was the one who had power from God to do what others could not or would not do. And, the stones would be quick to add, Jesus didn't abuse that power or hoard that power in himself. Jesus was and is willing to share it with anyone who desires to live in relationship with God. Jesus is eager to have disciples who will listen to his teachings and follow him in the way of righteousness and truth. If the stones would cry out, they would tell that Jesus resists temptation and helps others to do the same.

3. **JESUS HAS MERCY!**

If the stones would cry out, a third thing they would say is that Jesus has mercy. Do you remember the story in John chapter 8 about the woman who was caught in adultery? The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought a woman to the temple courts where Jesus was teaching. They accused her of adultery and picked up stones to throw at her. They reminded Jesus that the Law of Moses said they were to stone such a woman. They asked Jesus what he thought they should do. Jesus replied, "If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." At that, everyone began to go away until only Jesus was left with the woman. "Has no one condemned you?" asked Jesus. "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."
If stones communicated with each other, this would probably be one of their favorite stories to tell: How Jesus stopped the teachers from throwing stones at that woman. If stones would cry out, they would shout that Jesus has mercy!

**4. JESUS OFFERS LASTING PEACE**

Closely related to Jesus' non-violent mercy is a fourth truth. If the stones would talk, they'd cry out that "Jesus offers lasting peace!" In Luke 19:41, we see that Jesus wept over Jerusalem. "If you had only known," he said, "what would bring you peace."

Jesus was foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. The stone walls would be broken down, he said. And, in fact, they were. In A.D. 70, Jerusalem was besieged, and the holy temple was destroyed. Once again in their history, the Jewish people felt violated by a foreign power and abandoned by God. But Jesus had offered them another way. He had taught them to turn the other cheek. He had taught them that, if a Roman demanded them to carry a load one mile, they should carry it two. Jesus had taught them, Blessed are the meek. Jesus had taught them to forgive over and over again.

I'm not sure how he knew, but somehow Jesus figured out that lasting peace doesn't come through building stone walls. Stones can always fall or be knocked down. Only through following Jesus' non-violent teachings can we get the result of lasting peace.

**CONCLUSION**

In 2006, a Leonardo DiCaprio movie came out called *Blood Diamond*. I've never had a chance to see it, but I read about it. "Set during the Sierra Leone Civil War in 1996-2001, the film [portrayed] a country torn apart by the struggle between government soldiers and rebel forces." The film depicted "many of the atrocities" rebels perpetrated in order "to discourage [people] from voting in upcoming elections."
The film also educated the public about the use of diamonds, "mined in a war zone and sold to finance an insurgency, [or] invading army's war efforts." This use of blood diamonds--also known as conflict diamonds or war diamonds--has not been limited to Sierra Leone. Blood diamonds have also been used to finance rebellions in Angola, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, and the Republic of Congo.²

Because the purchase of such diamonds has contributed to violence and civil unrest, the United Nations and the diamond industry have come up with a "conflict-free" diamond certification method to assure purchasers that their diamonds have not contributed to warfare and violence.

If diamonds could talk, we'd want them to witness to love, not war. We'd want them to speak of peace, not violence. It was that more positive side of life that Jesus was thinking of when he replied to the Pharisees. If Jesus' disciples were silenced, then the stones would have to tell the story. And tell it they would! They'd testify that Jesus is blessed! They'd announce that Jesus resists temptation! They'd shout that Jesus has mercy! And they'd proclaim that Jesus offers lasting peace! Without a doubt, the stones will cry out!

notes:


2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blood_diamond