

What the stones have witnessed (Luke 19:28-40)

The biblical landscape is a stony one.

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I am a collector of stones. I choose them for their beauty, their shape, their hue, or some connection to the place and space in which I am hiking, paddling, or traveling.

Some I don't choose at all. They choose me as I stumble over them or sit upon them. Even years later, I know where I found them. I know their stories and provenance, even if not their geological classifications. When I look at them collected on my shelf, pick one up as I pass by and stand a moment, feel its heft or lightness, smoothness or sharp edges, it speaks to me.

The stones speak to me of my memories and dispositions at the time of their finding. Sometimes they speak to me of my suffering, or the tears I shed the year I stumbled upon them. Sometimes they speak of my joy at the memory of my traveling companions and our discoveries and adventures. Sometimes they speak of my solitude as I noticed them while sitting on a bluff or the edge of a shore.

I have stones from the beach at Lake Michigan, from the sandbars of the Wisconsin River, from the prairie of my home state Nebraska, and from my nation, the Cherokee of Oklahoma. I have a stone from the Negev Desert, a stone from the forests of Germany, a stone from the island of Rhodes. One of my friends brings me stones, too. A stone from the Lake Chapala region of Mexico. A stone from the Scottish island of Iona. She knows they have my name on them, perhaps like the stones written with the new name that no one knows except the one who receives it (Rev. 2:17), as Belden Lane suggests about a stone he once found on Mount Tabor.

In Luke's telling of Palm Sunday, Jesus knows that even if his disciples were silent, the very stones would cry out. The biblical landscape is a stony one. Traversing it, one is amazed that it produces enough sustenance for the sheep and goats that graze it and the people who inhabit it. The stones of the biblical landscape have heard the cries and laments and received the tears of those who trod them through the centuries. They have been picked up and hurled at others in the attempt, often successful, to silence or shame them (John 8). The stones are still lobbed today, and the stones still cry out.

As I hear this story, I think of the stones in the path of my ancestors who walked the Long Walk, known also as the Trail of Tears—the forced removal from the Smoky Mountains to eastern Oklahoma. Did my grandfather's great-grandfather pick up a stone as he walked the removal when he was just a little boy? I think of the stones in the path of all of those forcibly removed from their homes, the stones of the rubble of war, the stones under the feet of the refugees I meet who arrive at the stock the shelves ministry here in Chicago.

I think of what the stones have witnessed, the cries the stones have heard. Sometimes I believe I hear the stones crying out themselves, as Jesus knew they could. They cry for what they have witnessed, and they cry for themselves and the earth in which they are embedded and from which they have formed. They cry out with us and for all of us as we all await the coming of the Lord who renews the face of the earth.