

## **“Tongue-Tied”**

### **Sermon – April 5, 2020 Stone Presbyterian Church**

---

When someone has asked me, “What are you going to preach on Palm Sunday in the midst of this global pandemic?” I think that Ralph Kramden, a character played by Jackie Gleason on the TV show, “The Honeymooners” over 50 years ago expressed it best when he was put in a similar spot and would say, “Homina, homina, homina.”

I think all of us have been put on the spot at times and get tongue-tied as to what to say, though, truth be told, not having something to say has never stop me from saying it, as “virtually” all of you know that.

Still, to be honest, when life was good (for most of us) it was easier to preach—and us to act upon—God’s message of hope, peace, and love and to help the less fortunate. In part because, even when we are grateful for what we have, when we see people on the margins, in need of help there can be a bit of “there but for the grace of God go I.”

Not that we aren’t genuinely sympathetic to those people and don’t try to help, but we see them in a different world, not our world.

This “novel,” this “new,” coronavirus has shown us all too brutally a “new” world, a world in which there are no geographical, social, or political boundaries. We are all in one world.

People who worked hard, who were responsible, who did all the right things, now find themselves out of work, no health care in many cases, and wondering how they are going to get by. And those already struggling—the poor, the homeless, the chronically ill—are in even worse shape. All this suffering through no fault of their own.

Bad things do happen to good people. Even us.

And this last week of Lent, this Passion week reminds us of how true that is.

We started off our service with the waving of palms and tongues praising Jesus with shouts of “Hosanna”, “Save us, we pray.” Everyone was

## **“Tongue-Tied”**

### **Sermon – April 5, 2020 Stone Presbyterian Church**

---

happy that Jesus was coming to save them. But for them that meant the overthrow of their oppressors and the yoke of Roman rule. That is not what happened.

The full Gospel lectionary today was the whole \*Passion\* story, the whole \*Suffering\* story of Jesus in his last days, which we will hear at our Good Friday service at noon this coming Friday.

The part you heard today was just the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, one of the twelve disciples, one to whom Jesus that very evening had served the Last Supper and whose feet he washed, despite knowing what Judas was going to do.

And yet later in the story Peter also betrays Jesus by denying him in front of others. Judas and Peter both were tested, both betray him, both regret it deeply. One takes his life, the other goes on to proclaim the life given by Christ. But for the grace of God, where do we go?

Judas and Peter had choices. Jesus, too, had a choice and he chose the path of obedience to God despite where that led.

And it was not necessary for God to take the path that leads to Jesus' death; it is simply that the way of the cross was the way God chose to demonstrate his saving grace.

For Christ's passion was not a matter of satisfying the justice of God for us, but a matter of God's own entry into our world, the human condition, to show his saving work (the forgiveness of sins) in the ministry of Jesus, and in Jesus' continuing ministry through the church.

As you heard today in Paul's letter to Philippians that “Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.”

## “Tongue-Tied”

### Sermon – April 5, 2020 Stone Presbyterian Church

---

Sally Brown, a Presbyterian pastor and Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship at Princeton Seminary, argues that a better translation is “Jesus, ‘being in very nature God’, did not consider likeness to God to consist in grasping, but instead taking the form of a servant, poured himself out.” In other words, Jesus pouring himself out or emptying himself was the true nature of divine power.

Jesus’ choice to live as a servant was not a deferral of his divine nature, but rather its truest expression. To serve others is to imitate the divine.

As Sally Brown goes on to say, “Followers of Jesus need to trust the lead of their Servant Lord, who, in the hours before his death, broke bread with his betrayer, washed the feet of those who abandoned him, healed a soldier armed to arrest him, and forgave both the repentant criminal dying beside him and his unrepentant tormentors.”

Whatever we are going through, God has gone through it also through his son Jesus, even from the wagging tongues of his oppressors mocking him on the cross, while the tongues of his supporters were silent.

God was with Jesus throughout his suffering even when Jesus himself wondered and God is with us in these times of trial as he was when life was easier. And we can see and experience that presence of God in those who helping others, when we help other, and when others help us. God is with us when we are there for each other.

And so as we follow Jesus on his path to Calvary this week, let us humbly and gratefully with tongues employ “confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.

Amen.