

## **A sermon by Canon Maggie Guite**

### **‘The stones would shout out’ (Luke 19.40)**

**Isaiah 50.4-9a**

**Luke 19.28-40**

### **Palm Sunday April 14<sup>th</sup> 2019**

We began Lent with stones – the stones of the wilderness which Jesus would not turn into bread. In our 10 o'clock service on the first Sunday in Lent we also used stones to build a cairn – a cairn in the wilderness to remind any of us facing a 'wilderness experience' that others have been there before us, and particularly our Lord. Today, as we draw near to the end of Lent we hear of the stones of Jerusalem which would, said Jesus, 'shout out' if human beings forbore to do so, as he entered the city as Messiah – a very different kind of Messiah than from any that had been expected. A fanciful turn of speech, perhaps? Stones shouting out...Yet Malcolm and I both remember a hermit, a nun, who lived on the Holy Island of Bardsey, off the coast of North West Wales: we once were there, on a kind of week-long pilgrimage with students for

Westcott House (theological college), and as we celebrated the Eucharist in the roofless ruin of the old priory there, the hermit, who had joined us suddenly said something like, 'Hush! I can hear the stones shouting'.

Stones stand for many things: like water, they are among the most common things on earth, yet full of poignant symbolism. In the Bible stones are set up as reminders and pledges- as when Jacob set up a stone in the place where he had dreamed his dream of the ladder between heaven and earth (Genesis 28.18), or when Joshua celebrated and renewed the Covenant between the Lord and his people, when they entered the Promised Land (Joshua 24.28); stones bore the words of the Ten Commandments, when Moses brought them down from Sinai: all of these, stones for memory, and symbols of the deepest of relationship, God's covenant with his people. But stones can also speak of deprivation – as if a father were to give his children a stone instead of bread ( Luke 11.11); and of course they can be stones of punishment and hostility. In St John's Gospel, we read that Jesus' infuriated enemies took up stones to stone him (John 10.31), and also of how our Lord caused a self-righteous mob to lay

down its stones when a woman was 'taken in adultery' (John 8.1-11). The stones of cities can be built up as the Lord promises, or torn down, 'till not one stone is left upon another'. Christ, as the rejected stone becomes God's 'corner-stone,' but also a 'rock to make men stumble'. Within the church, we are all called to be 'living stones', built together into a spiritual house (1Peter 4-9). The prophet Ezekiel had looked forward to a day when God will give his people a new heart and put a new spirit within them, saying 'I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh'. (Ezekiel 36. 26) . WE are meant to be such a people. Looking forward to Easter, it is a stone which sealed his tomb which is rolled away to reveal his resurrection.

Stones can speak to us of so much. On this Palm Sunday, when Jesus came to the gates of the city upon whose stony streets he soon would be stumbling under the weight of his cross, we know that the joy of his coming and the pain of his suffering were closely intertwined. If the stones were heard to shout, it would have been of both pain and joy.

The prophet who had most nearly prophesied the kind of Messiah Jesus would be, prefigured the truth of this

day when he spoke of God's chosen, suffering servant, who 'set his face like a flint' (Isaiah 50.7) to fulfil the purpose the Lord gave him. Flint – and we who live among so much of it know how hard it is – speaks not of a stony heart, but of an unflinching obedience, shaped in the fires of love. This was how Jesus was during the week of his Passion,

Truly God *can* make stones shout to us, whether or not we hear them as the hermit –nun on Bardsey Island did - telling us that in his redeemed creation even the hardest things of life can be taken up in his purposes, and made to redound to his praise