

Today is Palm Sunday, although not all that long ago it was Christmas. And one of the hymns that we love to sing at Christmas is Joy to the World, even though the hymn itself is not actually that much about Christmas. Joy to the World is more about the Second Coming than it is about the first. Because listen to how the hymn begins: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come." Not the Lord has come, the way we might sing if we were talking about his first birth, but we're talking about the Lord is come, the Lord coming to his creation. And "let earth receive her king." We are looking forward to when Christ will come to claim his own. And we know this especially because Isaac Watts, who wrote the hymn, based it on Psalm 98. And Psalm 98 very clearly says in verse 9: "He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity." So Joy to the World is about the second coming of Christ, but since we usually sing it at Christmas, it's become a Christmas hymn.

But the second stanza in that hymn paints a very interesting picture. Listen to what it says: "Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let men their songs employ, while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy." So men are singing their praises, because Jesus reigns as King. And the world is breaking out with that same joy. Now, I suppose you could take "repeat" there to mean echoing, that people are singing so loudly that the whole creation is echoing with their song. But I don't think that's what Isaac Watts meant when he wrote this. I think he meant that the world itself is singing. Fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains lifting up their voices in song, lifting up their voices and praising the King who has come. I say this because again of Psalm 98, which says: "Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the hills sing for joy together." So rivers clapping, hills singing because the Lord is coming to claim his own. All of this leads us to ask, Christians, will we also sing with joy at the coming of our Lord? Will we join our voices with the whole creation as Jesus comes to us as our king? That's the question we need to ask as we look at our Gospel reading for today.

Because Luke tells us in verse 37: "As Jesus was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen." This large crowd that was traveling with Jesus is rejoicing and singing as he enters the city, and they're doing it because of what they had seen him do. They had seen him heal the sick. They had seen him cast out demons. They had seen him perform mighty miracles, even raising Lazarus from the dead just a few days earlier. And now that Jesus is entering Jerusalem, they can no longer contain their joy. They began to sing and to dance and maybe even bring out an instrument or two as they praise the Lord for what he has done. Verse 38 says: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Their joy also came from seeing Jesus do what the Bible said he was going to do. They watched him as he entered Jerusalem, riding on a donkey as a king, just as Zechariah said that he would. It was a clear sign to them the promised Son of David had come, that Jesus was coming as the king to claim the throne of his father David, and to reign as that King forever. It was one of the biggest moments in the history of salvation, right up there with things like the Red Sea. So how could they not be excited? How could they not sing and rejoice? God was keeping his promises right then and there, right there before their very eyes. That was a perfect reason for them to rejoice, to sing and to dance and to praise God for all that he has done. They simply can't contain themselves!

But not everybody on that day was so excited. Verse 39 says: "And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples.'" The Pharisees want Jesus to rebuke the crowd, to silence his disciples, because the Pharisees are convinced that the crowd is sinning. They are convinced that they are blaspheming because of what they're saying about Jesus. The crowd calls Jesus the King, but the Pharisees do not think that he is the king. The crowd calls Jesus the one who comes in the name of the Lord, but the Pharisees do not think that he is the promised one. The crowd calls Jesus the Son of David, but the Pharisees do not think that Jesus is the Christ. And it wasn't because the crowds knew something the Pharisees didn't, as if they knew what they had seen and that's why they were rejoicing, and the Pharisees just didn't know. No, the Pharisees knew, Christians. They knew what Jesus had done. They knew what Jesus had said. But they refused to believe in him. They were convinced that they were righteous without him. They didn't need Jesus. They were doing just fine. They trusted in themselves to stand before God. And for that reason, they would not rejoice or sing when Jesus came to Jerusalem. They wanted to silence the disciples too. Let no one rejoice on this day! Let no one sing that Jesus has come! Because their hard hearts, hardened by sin and unbelief, had shut their mouths and silenced their voices.

But Jesus answers them: "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." Even if everyone was quiet, even if they managed to silence the disciples, the stones themselves would cry out. The creation would sing and rejoice at the coming of its king. Why? Because our sin, Christians, has corrupted the entire creation. The whole universe groans under the weight of sin. Paul says in Romans 8: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." The creation has been subjected to futility, Paul says. It is no longer able to fulfill its purposes. It's no longer able to do what it was designed to do. It's like a machine that is malfunctioning. It's grinding and it's grating and it's falling apart, because something's gumming it up. Something's hindering it and holding it back. That's what's happened to the creation, Christians, because of our sin. The world is broken and corrupted because of what we have done. When Adam fell into sin, the creation itself was cursed. Listen to what God says, Genesis 3: "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life." The creation wants to be free of that bondage. It doesn't want to be corrupted anymore, just like those who believe in Jesus wants to finally be free of their sin.

So how could the stones keep silent when Jesus comes as King? How could the world not shout when Jesus comes to make all things new? Fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy, because the Lord is come! Because he is coming to set the creation free! And to set us free from our sins too.

And so if the stones themselves cry out, Christians, why would we keep silent today? Are we afraid of what the unbelieving world might say? Why should we be? Are we just lacking in excitement? This is all too familiar. We've heard it all before. So what is there to be excited about? But creation itself rejoices, Christians, so why should we keep silent anymore? Lift up your voices with strength! Lift them up! Be not afraid! Your King comes to you today bringing his reward with him. Christ comes to set you free from your sins. Is that not worth singing about?

Christ comes to make all things new. Is that not worth rejoicing about? Who cares what the Pharisees say? Why should their unbelief silence your joy? Lift up your voices, Christians. Lift them up with heaven and earth. Tell all the world what God has done, because the King is coming. God is keeping his promises. So let us welcome him today! Let us rejoice and sing, because Jesus comes to claim his own!

Let us pray. O Lord, we praise you, bless you and adore you, for all that you have done. Open our lips to sing of all your mighty works as we welcome your Son, Jesus Christ, as the one who comes in your name; for you live and reign with him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.