



**A Sermon from Dr. Jody Seymour, Senior Pastor
Davidson United Methodist Church
April 5, 2009
Palm/Passion Sunday**

The Sermon Text: Mark 15:12-32

I Don't Like the Sound of It

Have you ever listened to “Car Talk” on National Public Radio? If you have, then you know the famous laughs of “Click” and “Clack,” the Tappet brothers, who are none other than Tom and Ray Magliozzi. Tom and Ray take calls on their hour-long show attempting to answer questions about cars, life, and relationships.

One of the Tappet brothers’ techniques for solving the questions about what is wrong with the caller’s car is for Tom and Ray to ask the caller to reproduce the sound of what is wrong with the car. To listen to callers trying to imitate the various sounds of engines, doors, brake pedals, or crankshafts is, well, not a sight to behold; but since it is a radio show, it is a *sound* to behold.

After listening to some of the sounds, you might hear Tom or Ray say, “Whoa, I don’t like the sound of that.” It is amazing how these two working mechanics can diagnose what is happening with a car miles away simply by listening to sound of it.

Today, I want us to listen to the sounds of Holy Week so that we can hear what is happening. You might call this Passion/Palm Sunday a kind of “rehearsal” for the actual event. We are not there yet, but today is a time to rehearse what is going to happen this week so that we will not miss something important.

When I do a wedding rehearsal, I tell the nervous bride and groom that they can mess up because this is a rehearsal. They are often fidgety and scared because they want to make sure they do not make a mistake or they do not know what to expect. I tell them that is why we are doing a rehearsal so they can not worry about the mechanics the next day, but be present to the situation and say their vows to each other and mean it.

I then try to take the pressure of by saying, “Look, no matter what you say or how you say it or what you do not say, at the end of the ceremony you will be married; I’ll take care of that, so try to be present to the moment.” Today I want all of us to know that, no matter what happens today, we will have Easter at the end of the week. There is no stopping that, but the reason for the rehearsal of Holy Week today on this Passion/Palm Sunday is so that we can be present to what happens this week and not miss something important.

Let’s start with an observation that many in our world do not like the sound of if we really listen. What we do like the sound of is the sound of what feels good and the sound of



winning. To really listen to the sounds of Holy Week can be like listening to fingernails inching along a blackboard.

There are some today who reject a God who seems to allow his son to suffer such indignities and others who question the need for someone to die in order to save the world. Then there are others of us who make this whole week so religious that we no longer hear the true sound of what happens because it becomes background music while we wait for the “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” refrain.

Well, the truth is, if we listen to the real story during this rehearsal, there is a reality that allows us to say, “I don’t like the sound of it.” Why did there have to be such pain, suffering, denial, and forsakenness?

I remember a sound that I did not like. When my mother continually asked me to do something or refrain from doing something and I did my usual, “I’m gonna do what I wanna do,” there would be the sound of the back screen door slowly opening. It made a kind of scratchy squeak. That sound meant that my mother was going to the back yard to cut a switch off the hedge. The next sound I would hear is her telling me to come get my just desserts.

The switch was never a big switch and it did not hurt that bad, but it did get my attention. I’ll never forget the sound of that back door opening and I still don’t like the sound of it, but in some way it did me some good.

I suppose if we had listened to Jesus, maybe a door would not have had to open. I do not know; I’m not in on God’s plan or what God had in mind, really. All I know is that Jesus’ kind of love was rejected by this world and often still is. We sometimes just don’t like the sound of it. We do not like the sound of taking chances and losing, or turning cheeks or praying for those who terrorize us, or walking extra miles, or risking dying to live. We do not like the sound of it.

Don McLean’s song “Starry, Starry Night” is a lament about the life of Vincent Van Gogh. Vincent was a man ahead of his time in his art, and a man whose words were often misunderstood. He felt often alone in the world - so much so that one starry, starry night “he took his life as lover’s often do.” I think of the haunting words of that song, but if you change a few words they would apply to Jesus:

Now I understand what you tried to say to me,
How you suffered for your sanity,
How you tried to set them free.
They would not listen, they did not know how.
Perhaps they’ll listen now.

For they could not love you,
But still your love was true.



And when no hope was left in sight
On that starry, starry night,
You **GAVE** your life, as lovers often do.
But I could have told you, **JESUS**,
This world was never meant for one
As beautiful as you.

Now I think I know what you tried to say to me,
How you suffered for your sanity,
How you tried to set them free.
They would not listen, they're not listening still.
Perhaps they never will...

Jesus' kind of love is different and it takes chances. I used to wonder as a child, and I still wonder, if God could have done it differently if we had listened. But what we have is a story of God of the cross who longs to get our attention and who offers life in order to give us second chances.

Though I still do not like the sound of it, this is a story of how God longs to reconcile us to a way of life that is "the way, the truth, and the life." There are all kinds of theories, some of which differ from each other, on why Jesus had to die. I'm not going into those today. What I want us to hear is the sounds of the story, even if we don't like the sound of it, so that we will hear God again say this year, "For God's sake pay attention. This is personal. I want you. Don't waste this offer. I'm dead serious about this."

There is nothing new about the struggle with the sound of the story. What is called the "passion narrative" begins with Judas not liking the sound of a woman pouring costly spices on Jesus' feet. He shouts that this is a misuse of an expensive product that could have been sold to help the poor. Jesus sees through Judas' protest and tells him to hush up because this dear woman is actually offering Jesus a gift of love in preparation for some tough days ahead.

Judas promptly goes out and forgets the economy of love. He sells Jesus out of 30 pieces of silver.

The religious leaders do not like the sound of those Hosannas in the streets because they know that Pilate and Rome are suspicious of their religion to begin with, and such shouting in the streets sounds awfully like there is a new king in town. Caiaphas and other religious hot shots know that there is room for only one king in town and it is not Jesus. They do not like the sound of it.

Peter does not like the sound of Jesus pouring water into a bowl. He does not like the sound of Jesus laying his outer garment over a chair as he kneels to wash their feet. Peter does not like the sound of Jesus saying, "I want you to be servants like this."



Peter also does not like Jesus changing the traditional words over the table that night when he talks about body and blood and being denied by his friends. Peter does not like the sound of it so much that he protests, yet again, and says the rest of those losers around the table may duck out on Jesus, but the rock Peter never will.

This time, Jesus does not like the sound of Peter's words and tells him to have another glass of wine because he is going to need it before the night is over. Peter will later not like the sound of the rooster crowing.

And of course none of them or us like the sound of what happens next. There are angry religious leaders asking Jesus if he is indeed the Christ, the sound of a mob shouting, "crucify him," the sound of water being poured so Pilate can wash his hands, and the sound of Jesus breathing his last... and then the slow sound of a heavy stone being rolled over the place of dead promises.

The truth is, unless you are desensitized to the story on this rehearsal day, you are not supposed to like the sound of it. So now, it is time for our rehearsal:

(A table full of objects is now revealed next to the Lord's Table)

Here is a palm branch to remind us of the loud sound of "Hosannas" that are full of hope and joy, but that soon fade away.

Here is a bag full of 30 pieces of silver. Now hear the sound of these 30 pieces of silver as I pour them into this bowl. Not much money for such a man as this.

Then there is the sound of water being poured into a bowl and the sound of man picking up a towel as he kneels to wash their feet. (Pour water into bowl) And then is the sound of protest that a king would become a servant.

And next there is the soft sound of bread being broken (break the bread at the communion table) and the sound of wine being poured (pour wine into a chalice). This is the sound of love being given.

There is but one other sound that ends this story. (Now use a heavy hammer to pound a large spike into a board that is on the table) I do not like the sound of it, but is the sound of God's willingness to personally risk life that we might have life.

(The Choir now sings, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.")