“everything [in] between: shouting & silence” - Stephanie Sorge, 4/13/25

 If Jesus came riding into town today, I think we’d be falling over ourselves to welcome him. Finally - salvation is here! Oh, and by the way, here’s the list of everything that needs to be fixed. Yes, it’s longer than a CVS receipt! I imagine a similar excitement welcoming Jesus to Jerusalem. There was a palpable change in the air. In this “Triumphal Entry,” Jesus finally seemed to be stepping into the role he was born to play. He was there to save God’s people, and for the first time, he looked the part. How quickly the tides can turn.

 This takes center stage in our gospel stories, but there is so much more happening in Jerusalem. Jews from all over were pouring into the city, preparing for Passover. The real parade was happening on the other side of town. Pilate and his troops had their own triumphant entry into the city. You may recall a story from a few weeks ago, when Jesus was told about how Pilate and his forces had violently attacked a bunch of Galileans while they were worshiping. The military parade into Jerusalem just before Passover said everything anyone needed to know. Pilate wielded the power of the Empire, and he was ready to use it. The message was clear: stay in line.

 Anyone with any modicum of power in Jerusalem - or those who were chasing it - would have been ready to welcome Pilate, rolling out the red carpet. They would have been eager to show everyone else where they were in the pecking order. The rest of the people were expected to show their fear and respect. Bow down, or, at the very least, don’t remain standing where anyone else can see you. It was best to keep a low profile when it came to interacting with the Empire.

 I wonder if that’s why the Pharisees were so worried about the commotion Jesus and his disciples were making. Pilate might have heard the disturbance, or it could have drawn the attention of some of his soldiers, or even locals looking to curry favor with Rome. The commotion that surrounded Jesus was exactly the kind of thing that could get one killed.

 Accounts from those who lived through the Holocaust include stories of parents or grandparents, older siblings, or others, desperately trying to keep the babies quiet. Whether a family was actively hiding from the Gestapo, or if they were already detained, cries drew attention, and that was the last thing they wanted. That necessary silence for the most vulnerable was different from the other deafening silence: the silence of ordinary citizens - many good, Christian people - who saw what was happening but pretended they didn’t. Those who witnessed the violence and injustice but turned away. Willful ignorance didn’t happen overnight. It started with silence despite the uneasiness many Germans felt about Hitler’s most radical views. To be clear, there were certainly German citizens cheering loudly, but it was the silence of the majority that enabled the perpetuation of evil.

 So the Pharisees said, Jesus, for the love of God, tell your disciples to keep quiet! I imagine how Jesus looked at them before he responded, “Even if they were silent, the very stones would shout out.” Cries for justice cannot ultimately be silenced. Those who were still shedding layers of clothing ahead of Jesus knew this. They didn’t have wealth or power, but they would not stay silent.

 As we journey through Holy Week, we will see that most of those same voices grew silent, or even began to shout a different message with the crowd. There was Pilate, with his troops. Once Jesus was in custody, all seemed to be lost. But the stones would still cry out.

 In this week of readings, we’ll see the disciples all over the place. Following Jesus wasn’t easy then, and it’s not easy now. Sometimes we get it right. A lot of times we don’t. But Jesus keeps inviting us, in the shouting and the silence.

 Today we get to baptize little Emily Kempfer-Ware. It’s an occasion worthy of great celebration, even as we know her journey - the journey of discipleship that we share - will not always be straight or easy. Especially in the days ahead. Even so - especially so - we welcome her into this community, into the body of Christ and all of its imperfections. We will make promises to nurture her in the faith, to hold this story with her as she begins to claim it herself.

 We recognize that God is already at work in Emily’s life. God has already claimed her in love and grace, and that is sufficient for her calling. As she continues to find her voice, and grow into the amazing person God is creating her to be, our job is not to silence her, but to help her find the song she was born to sing, and to sing loudly with her.

 We entered into the Lenten season with a visible reminder of our mortality. We are reminded that discipleship, not self-preservation, is our call. Generally speaking, most of us have not found ourselves confronted with very real and existential threats for speaking out for what is right. That is changing. We’ve seen what has happened to those who have spoken up to voice concerns or dissent. We’ve seen what has happened even to politically and ideologically aligned appointees for carrying out their duties that happen to conflict with the president’s personal agenda. The conditions that are being created by administrative policies are the same kinds of conditions that led to Hitler’s rise to power. People in deep pain - economic and otherwise - turned to support the person who promised deliverance. That first choice for self-preservation led to the next, which led to silence and complicity in evil.

 What a cheery subject for a baptism, right? And yet, at the top of our Baptismal vows, we are asked if we renounce evil and its power in the world. In baptism, we choose our allegiance. We probably don’t often think about the radical nature of these vows, or the potential risks inherent in them, but here we are. We are confronted with the choice to renounce evil, or to remain silent. Thank God we don’t have to do it alone. We are all connected by these Baptismal vows, and the promises we make are not only to God, but also to each other. We renounce evil and its power in this world, but we don’t have to do that alone. That’s really good news.

 Thankfully, even in the times we fall into the silence of self-preservation, God’s liberating work continues. All of creation has a song, inspired by the love and grace and justice of God. Those songs must be sung, especially in the most difficult hours. Even when we fall silent, the song continues. The rocks and mountains will carry the tune until we are ready to sing again. We cannot silence God’s creation. We cannot bend the moral arc of the universe away from God’s intended reign of justice and peace. Baptism is about God’s grace at work in our lives, but as we make and reaffirm our baptismal vows, we are invited to choose sides. We are invited to renounce - loudly - evil and its power in the world.

 Little Emily can’t do that yet, so these vows are made on her behalf. Will we live into our own vows, and fulfill the promises we make today to nurture and encourage her on the path of discipleship?

 We know what is waiting in Jerusalem. We see what is happening all around us. But still, we proclaim Christ’s triumph. God is not done yet. So church, will we stay silent? (No) Will we stay silent? (No!) Will we shout for justice? (Yes) Will we cry out for peace? (Yes) Will we raise our voices to renounce evil and it’s power in the world, and will we keep singing God’s love song, until Emily, and every beloved child of God, knows that it is their own? (Yes) Amen!