

Have you ever called someone dumb as a rock? Perhaps not, but of course it's no compliment. Now we usually use the word dumb in the wrong sense. Dumb literally means to be without speech - unable to make a sound. But we usually use dumb to say someone isn't very smart. However you want to use it, it can fit into our gospel reading for today. Jesus, the Messiah, is riding into Jerusalem with a crowd cheering him on and spreading their cloaks on the road. Are the Pharisees happy? Nope. They tell Jesus he should tell his followers to be quiet. But he replies, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would cry out."

Interestingly, when it comes to proclaiming the truth, the Pharisees are dumber than rocks. Great events are happening right before their eyes. Our color today is violet or purple to represent royalty. We recognize Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords. On that day God was riding into the holy city of Jerusalem to bring about monumental change - and they didn't get it. God's presence was so powerful and so obvious that if the people would actually be silent the stones themselves would be

heard to be shouting. How can the Pharisees miss something so obvious?

I've said before that when I was a kid the pictures of Pharisees, scribes, Sadducees, and all the religious leaders that I saw in Sunday School portrayed them to be a pretty sour looking lot. It couldn't have been more obvious that these were mean selfish bad guys. Jesus and his followers were obviously the good guys. You imagine these power and money hungry villains running the temple. When Jesus comes in and upsets the tables of the money changers, or goes into these speeches against them we find ourselves thinking they had it coming.

That might be fine to teach children in Sunday School. But as adults we have to realize that the Pharisees didn't run around with the words, "Evil bad guy," tattooed on their foreheads. They looked a lot like the people in our neighborhoods. If we knew them I think we'd probably say they were basically good people. In other words, they may have been very much like ourselves. Whether or not that is actually true, if we want to really open ourselves to our gospel reading we'd better consider the possibility. How did these educated

religious leaders miss what was so obvious that even the dumb rocks got it?

Perhaps it was like this. In the Women's Bible study group we are beginning a course on basics of Lutheran beliefs. Last week we saw a video segment that talked about what we call the "Opinio Legis." This is a Latin phrase the Lutheran reformers used to refer to the way of the world, which is this: There is some power or force in the universe that you want to get it right with. That somehow if you live right and do the right things and act the right way and follow the right rules your life will be good, you will be happy, you will be fulfilled.

And we learned that the gospel of Jesus Christ exposes the opinio legis as the fraud that it is. It is a lie. It is *the* lie the entire world lives under and is bound by, and boy is it binding. It rules nearly every corner of everything that happens in our lives, and its effect is all consuming and devastating.

The opinio legis says to parents of children that they have to have their children in sports and drama and music. They have to be well rounded and get good grades. They need to develop

good self-esteem. They need to have every possible opportunity made available to them. What is the number 1 reason why people move to Victor? The school. People make major life decisions based on giving their children the best opportunities possible. Now I'm not saying we should start to neglect our children, or stop caring about them, but what I hear from more parents than anything else is how busy and stressed they are about their children. They know their kids are overscheduled and yet they are afraid to reduce the schedule. They know they are cheating their children out of childhood and yet they don't know how to get out of it. The opinio legis pounds the constant refrain of "Do this, do this, do this. Any mistake you make with your kids will ruin them for life. There is no room for stumbling."

Senior citizens worry about retirement funds and Social Security, health care costs, medical problems, their adult children, mental deterioration, and on and on goes the list. The opinio legis says, "Life is scary. There are risks. You don't want to run out of money. You don't want to be ashamed of losing your house. Your friends will think you're a failure."

The Pharisees, the scribe, the Levites the Sadducees worried about keeping the fleeting autonomy they had come to have with the Roman occupation of their land. What happens if there is a riot during Passover? What happens if religious zealots come to power and the Romans crack down? What happens if they cannot control their own people well enough? What if the Romans raise the taxes? What if they require more obedience to Caesar? What if they don't allow Jews to observe the Sabbath anymore? And on and on and on went the list.

There were pressures. The Pharisees lived in fear. They clung to the only thing they thought was true - righteously following the legal code from Moses, and keeping the right and proper ceremonies and decorum happening in the temple. Only if they did it right would they survive at all.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem when he saw it, the Bible tells us. He saw a city trapped in the opinio legis. Did he hate the Pharisees? No. Was he in an out of control rage when he overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple? No. He was trying to free the people he dearly loved from the lies which controlled every corner of their lives - the exact same

set of lies which *tries* to control every corner of our lives too.

Would we miss our God coming into our presence - a presence so obvious that the dumb stones would cry out if people were silent?

Here's the truth - you point out the *opinio legis* for what it is -a lie- and you will pay the price. The world doesn't want to hear that the rules it lives by are a fraud. Yes, there are consequences. The Romans utterly destroyed Jerusalem when the delicate balance maintained by the Sadducees and Pharisees when out of whack in the year 70. If you don't live your life by the rules of everyone else - even if they are unhealthy - you'll suffer. And as for Jesus, well, you know what'll happen to him by Friday. The world often does not want to hear the good news that Jesus came to proclaim. Too many people have invested too heavily in the *opinio legis* for them to hear the truth that it is actually a lie.

But you know the good news. The good news is that God loves you. The good news is that who you are is defined by God and God alone. The good news is that your worth and value are

held by God - not someone else, and not your accomplishments or failures.

Jesus came to Jerusalem to proclaim life, and life abundantly. Jesus gives the same promise to you. When the world cries out that Jesus' ways are wrong, ignore it. Stay solid in the faith and nourishment that only God provides. Amen