After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” They said, “The Lord needs it.” Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

This meeting house was built in 1884, 129 years ago. Many people, many generations have worshipped here, prayed here, were baptized here, and married here. And yes, there have been many funerals here. We have deep emotional connections to this place. If these walls could talk!

The high holy days have been celebrated here in many ways; there have been pageants and plays, and special services to mark various mile-stones in our collective life. If these walls could talk!

These walls have seen congregational meetings, community meetings, vigils, gatherings for fellowship, fund-raisers, and untold events organized for the sake of our local community. Try as I might, it would be impossible to chronicle everything that has taken place in this, our church. If these walls could talk!

Consider all the saints who have gathered in this place; consider their witness, their commitment to serve, to speak the truth in love, and to give their lives for the sake of others. If these walls could talk!

How about those who came to Christ here? How about those who found the courage to confess their sins and be born again here? Consider those who found forgiveness here, and learned to live again. Consider those who were lost, and found a loving home here. If these walls could talk!

And just think of all the children who were brought up in the faith here; who learned the stories of the Bible here, who studied for their Confirmation, who grew up to be members of this church…and were married here, and then had children of their own, who were also raised in the faith here. Think of the generations. If these walls could talk!

And let’s not forget all the struggle: these walls have seen hopes left unfulfilled; these walls have seen divisions that tore at the fabric of Christian unity; disagreements and arguments fought with passion and conviction; and heart-breaking struggles born of selfishness and misunderstanding. If these walls could talk!

How many sermons were preached here by clergy and laity, women and men? Sometimes it was the Gospel that came through, and sometimes it was the preacher’s personal agenda. Sometimes it was good and faithful theology preached, and other times the basis for the spoken word was unrecognizable. If these walls could talk!

For 129 years the ministry that has flowed from this church building has been the work of human hands, and the commitment of heart and soul. The goal has always been to be faithful to God’s call as discerned through the Holy Scriptures and prayer. Yet it has never been perfect. Still, the goal has always been faithfulness; faithfulness to the Lord. If these walls could talk!

Yet we must be careful to keep these walls and this church building in perspective. These sacred walls are a very small part of God’s grand design in Christ Jesus. We are heirs of the promise God made to humankind from the beginning. We are descended from a long line of saints who gave their lives for the sake of Christ, and for the future of the Church. And we are now that voice, in this place. We are the current generation charged with the task of proclaiming the faith and passing it on to the next generation. How important is it? It is so important that if we were struck dumb, the very stones would cry out.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. He would do it in a way that left no doubt who he was. He was the king of heaven, and his disciples treated him as a king, setting him on a colt and spreading their garments on the road, and hailing: 

Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!
We know there is peace in heaven because this is the king of heaven. Everything Jesus did in his earthly ministry showed him to be a man of peace. Here comes the king of highest heaven, who, ironically, gave himself – poured himself out – for the lowest on earth, the most vulnerable ones. But on that day, as Jesus made his way up to Jerusalem, they hailed him as the king of heaven. Did they even consider it was possible for him to die? Did they know what was about to happen?

Those who hailed Jesus king that day probably had no idea what was about to happen. In more poignant irony, the one who spent his life healing and freeing and giving life – the author of life as Christ is often called – was about to be killed; his own life snuffed out.

Jesus was a prophet. And if the people really listened to their own scriptures (the Hebrew Scriptures), perhaps they could have heard the stones crying out! I’m thinking of the lament spoken by Jesus as he set his face for Jerusalem, as he himself remembered the prophets of old (Jesus’ lament found in Mt. 23:37, and Lk. 13:34):

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

Symbolically, the stones were weeping for the blood of the prophets. But the crowd would hear none of it. Their ears were filled with the sounds of jubilation.

The people lived under oppressive Roman rule. The prospect of a new king who, like Jesus, would care for the least in the kingdom, was almost too good to be true. The people longed for a peace like the peace they envisioned in heaven. They longed for this peace, which they experienced in Jesus. They were no doubt jubilant in the hope of Jesus becoming their new king.

But the jubilant crowds were attracting unwanted attention. The Jewish authorities feared that this demonstration would upset the delicate balance the Jewish community had with their Roman overlords. If the Roman authorities thought the Jews were getting out of hand, they wouldn’t think twice about crushing them and tearing down their temple…which is exactly what happened in the later part of the seventh decade AD, or Common Era. Between the years 66-73CE a war broke out between Jewish Zealots and Rome; Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed.

The Jewish authorities were right to fear the commotion the crowds were making over Jesus. So they pleaded with Jesus to silence the throng. But Jesus’ mission and purpose would not be thwarted. God’s ultimate plan would not be prevented by the Pharisee’s request, nor by any Roman action, for, as Jesus said, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.

If these walls could talk, what would they say about our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ? What would they say about our care for the least among us? What would they say about our compassion, our love for God and one another? What would these walls say about us?

These walls know the truth of our humanness; they know our human frailty and failings; they also know our commitment and love for the church’s ministry; they know how we strive to love each other and work together for the good of others. They know all this and more, and they beckon us each Sunday – these walls beckon us – to be gathered again, to hear again the Word of God, and to be strengthened again in heart and mind for the work of Christ, and the prospering of the dominion of God.

These walls hold us and encourage us in our journey. In that way they are sacred and holy. Yet the work is ours; this building – these walls – don’t do the work for us. Yes, they keep out the rain and the wind, and they keep us warm in the winter and cool in the summer; and for that, these walls are a blessing. These walls mark the place where this body of Christ assembles. These walls bear witness to our labor, and the work we do to fulfill our calling to be God’s pilgrim people.

No, these walls cannot talk. That’s probably a good thing. However, we must speak; we must speak and proclaim and embody the Gospel of Jesus Christ each day of our lives. We must not leave it to these walls, or the stones to speak in our stead. We must speak; we must proclaim, we must become, the saving grace of our God, in Christ Jesus our Lord – today, and every day! Amen!