

Finding Transportation for Jesus
A Sermon for Palm Sunday
March 28, 2021
The Rev. Robin Teasley

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. Mark 11:1-11

For some reason, the writer of Mark’s gospel had a lot to say about the donkey.

In our first reading today, before the procession, we heard how Jesus entered into Jerusalem. Mark used seven of the eleven verses to tell us about the donkey. Mark is the writer who does not waste much time with details, so this is worth noticing.

Mark calls it a colt, but we know it’s a donkey because Matthew, Luke, and John all use the same Greek word (*polon*), and it is translated as colt or donkey. A note about donkeys – I have a friend who raises them on her farm and she says that donkeys are very smart. They had to change the lock on the barn because Eeyore, one of their oldest and wisest, was letting the goats out.

Jesus sends two disciples to find the donkey. We don’t know which two disciples, but we do know that some of them had been dreaming of sitting on Jesus’ right hand and left hand when he entered into his glory, and so we can imagine their disappointment when they were assigned to donkey detail. Finding transportation for Jesus was delegated to the disciples.

As disciples, we are also delegated to finding transportation for Jesus. Remember in the beginning of Mark when John the Baptist said, Prepare the way of the Lord? This is a basic definition of discipleship – preparing the way of the Lord. The Apostle Paul elaborates on what it means to be a disciple, telling the Philippians, “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.” Being a disciple is not about the glory, not about sitting on a throne, or being the most popular or most powerful. It’s about finding transportation for Jesus. How do we humble ourselves, empty ourselves to find transportation for Jesus?

We have an idea of what that looks like, it's just that sometimes we forget. When we get caught up in the crowds and confusion of life, we are distracted by fame and fortune, power and glory. But when we will let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus, we can find transportation for Jesus in all kinds of ways. The first disciples were sent out to complete a simple task, to find a donkey.

We are also called to simple tasks like these. We take a meal to a grieving family, we write notes of encouragement to the lonely, we feed the hungry at the Hope Center, we pray for those who are sick and in need. We set the table, we offer our praises, we do the small things that must be done so that Jesus can enter our lives, our worship space, our world. We are always preparing the way of the Lord.

This all seems so mundane, but it is how we provide the transportation for Jesus; it's how we prepare the way for Jesus to enter into the lives of people who are waiting for salvation from the violence, poverty, oppression, and suffering of this world. First century Jerusalem was not so different from our world today. There are many still waiting for Jesus, shouting Hosanna! Lord, save us now!

Holy week offers us a space to focus on how it is that Jesus saves us. On Maundy Thursday Jesus will give himself to us at the table, and on Good Friday he will give himself on the cross for the world. The story we have heard today is hard and painful, deep and rich, and we are the main characters along with Jesus. We are being sent to find the donkey, because the story is not finished. Palm Sunday begins with a donkey. Where we go from here is up to us.

The poet Mary Oliver wrote a poem about the donkey, that reminds us that we are all able to perform the simple tasks that will allow Jesus to enter our lives.

On the outskirts of Jerusalem
the donkey waited.
Not especially brave, or filled with understanding,
he stood and waited.

How horses, turned out into the meadow,
leap with delight!
How doves, released from their cages,
clatter away, splashed with sunlight.

But the donkey, tied to a tree as usual, waited.
Then he let himself be led away.
Then he let the stranger mount.

Never had he seen such crowds!
And I wonder if he at all imagined what was to happen.
Still, he was what he had always been: small, dark, obedient.

I hope, finally, he felt brave.
I hope, finally, he loved the man who rode so lightly upon him,
as he lifted one dusty hoof and stepped, as he had to, forward.