

April 10, 2022

**“The Lord Needs It”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

Luke 19:28-40

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.”

Sermon “The Lord Needs It”

I was reading an article about how to keep the scriptures relevant for our younger folks. The author said because most of them are not familiar with farms anymore we need to update the metaphors. Though here in this part of Wisconsin it’s probably not as true as in the suburbs and cities. Like instead of beating sword into plowshares we say beating guns into computers, that kind of thing.

But in Jesus’s time the world revolved around agriculture and in order to relate to his audience he used parables that involved seeds, wheat, plants, and vines. And he loved to tell stories about sheep and goats and in this case in the gospel of Luke, a colt.

Which for those of you not raised on a farm, is a young horse. In the other gospels it reads donkey, but the point is it was the smallest rideable horse-like creature he could find.

So I was thinking about Jesus’ triumphal entrance on a colt and what would be a more current metaphor to explain the scripture. Then I realized that there isn’t a context in the 21st century

where you would go up to a stranger, take her car and explain “It’s for the Lord!” You would wind up in jail.

But I did like this phrase, “It’s for the Lord”, imagine if we started each day with this as the first thing on our lips, “I’m getting up for God”. Especially on those days when you don’t want to get up. I think about when people suffer from depression and/or are grieving and don’t want to go on, what if they can say to themselves “God may need me today”, would that help them take those tiny baby steps that might help them keep moving slowly forward? Or people who suffer from anxiety and don’t want to leave the house. Could they tell themselves “It’s for God” and go with just a little less fear. Not always, since some of those conditions are not something you can talk yourself out of, but maybe, just maybe, for some– that might be a way to remember you matter to the world.

I’m not someone who believes that God has a master plan and each of us play a predestined and pivotal role, but I do believe God has a deep yearning for a better world and each of us can be weavers of that vision. Each of us can be moved by the power of the Holy Spirit to help bring about this world built on loving kindness, justice, and equity.

A world built “for the Lord” by the people of God taking tiny steps, like simple kindnesses, acts of resistance to oppression, finding their voice. Why? Because it’s for God. I’m not talking about a world where we are all Christian, I am talking about a world where we all act like Jesus, and love one another.

This scripture from the gospel this morning shows us, in sharp contrast, the difference between what God wants and what humans want– without those guiding principles of love, acceptance, and justice. I’ve said it before, that Jesus’s entry into Jerusalem is an act of protest and mockery. It’s also another moment in the bible where we see that Jesus never does what we think he’s going to do. You would think at the start of the last week of his life he wouldn’t begin it with a subversive, noisy parade that calls attention to himself, but that’s what he does according to the story.

Now let’s back up a little and talk about the Governor, Pilate, because I just read a commentary that had new information for me. It said that in order to end up the Governor of the region that Jerusalem is in, you had to be kind of a screw up. I didn’t know that. There was nothing prestigious about this post. It was like if you were in the military in current times and got sent to the north slope of Alaska. Pilate is given only two jobs: maintain order and collect the taxes.

To make matters worse for Pilate, Jerusalem was where those weird people lived who only had one God and didn’t worship Emperor Tiberius, that alone was threatening. We also know that Jerusalem’s population swelled to like 10 times its normal size with all the people that came for the Passover celebration.

This too was threatening to the Roman government, especially when Passover in and of itself is a celebration in remembrance of a small group of Jews who overthrew an Empire, in another time.

Well, I don't know if overthrow is the right term, but as the story goes a whole lot of soldiers from the Egyptian Empire were swallowed up by the Red Sea.

So considering all this, Pilate always had a show of force through the main gates when he came into town, to keep the fear of the Roman Empire on the minds of the Jewish people. He would ride into town sitting high on a purebred stallion, surrounded by hundreds of troops heavily armed and decked out in full regalia in a military parade.

The crowds didn't cheer for him though because there was a lowly born, darker skinned, Jewish man causing a ruckus coming through the lesser gate on the back of a young colt. You see the contrast here?

Jesus is showing us that the path God wants us to trod is the path of humility and peace, not the path of worldly power, domination, and fear. We have to decide for ourselves which gate do we want to come riding through, the gate of worldly power or the gate of Godly power.

The path to peace, though, it's not so easy to follow right now. The other day I woke up early and was having my coffee and I ended up reading the New York Times on my phone. I felt my anger rise at the horrors of Ukraine, I was getting depressed over the bickering over the Supreme Court nomination. The next thing you know at six o'clock in the morning I'm feeling hopeless for humanity.

So I got off my phone and picked up a print copy of Discover magazine, and read articles of all the breakthroughs they are making in medical science, all the new clean energy technology and one article on citizen science.

This is a program where any one of us can participate in helping scientists gather information, crowdsourcing things like bird sightings, insect migrations, and such. Amateur astronomers help the Hubble scientist narrow down where to search the skies for other planets. Strangers working together for a betterment of humanity.

All of a sudden I realized I was in a good mood, my hope had returned and I had a sense that we stood a chance as a species. Now don't get me wrong, we have to be informed and know what's going on in the world, but in small increments and certainly not before our prayers and coffee.

This reminded me of a Cherokee story that I have heard all my life, you have probably heard it too but it is about a young boy who came to his Grandfather, filled with anger at another boy who had done him an injustice. The old Grandfather said to his Grandson, "Let me tell you a story. I too, at times, have felt a great hate for those that have taken so much, with no sorrow for what they do. But hate wears you down, and hate does not hurt your enemy. Hate is like taking poison and wishing your enemy would die. I have struggled with these feelings many times."

"It is as if there are two wolves inside me; one wolf is good and does no harm. He lives in harmony with all around him and does not take offense when no offense was intended. He will

only fight when it is right to do so, and in the right way. But the other wolf is full of anger. The littlest thing will set him into a fit of temper.”

"He fights everyone, all the time, for no reason. He cannot think because his anger and hate are so great. It is helpless anger, because his anger will change nothing. Sometimes it is hard to live with these two wolves inside me, because both of the wolves try to dominate my spirit.”

The boy looked intently into his Grandfather's eyes and asked, "Which wolf will win, Grandfather?" The Grandfather smiled and said, "The one I feed.”

What wolf are you going to feed inside of you? When you think of this Palm Sunday story, be aware of the fact that many of the people yelling, “Hail and Hosanna, Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” are the same people who will be yelling “Crucify him, Crucify him!” in just a few days.

Giving our life over to God, living each day “for the Lord”, feeding the right wolf. It keeps us on the path of peace, it keeps us loving and kind and centered in the spirit of God. May all your days be lived for God, AMEN

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