

March 24, 2024

“The Lord Needs It”

Mark 11:1-11

Intro:

I always enjoy Palm Sunday. There is so much drama and ups and downs of emotion and celebration. At church we get to re-live our youthful days as we watch the kids parade around the church with their palm fronds, and we sing them along their route with Hosannas. I wonder if when Jesus was on the road entering Jerusalem, the kids were running in and out of the crowd waving their own palm branches while the adults shouted Hosanna?

There’s majesty in the Biblical narrative – Jesus is coming to the Jerusalem, but instead of being just another pilgrim, this time he is coming recognized as a king, although not a king like the people were envisioning.

There is noise, and there is no small amount of conflict. Religious leaders are trying to get Jesus to shut down a celebration He never initiated. The response? “Even if I wanted to shut down this celebration, the very rocks would cry out.” Creation knows that something significant is going to happen and it can’t contain itself.

There is anger from those who feel threatened by Jesus’ popularity with the people, and it leads to dark conversations and plots in dark back rooms.

There is sadness as well. Jesus, in the middle of all that is going on, looks ahead to what is before Him, and he weeps for the city and the people who don’t recognize the wonder of God that is in front of them, and who will later act with violence out of ignorance and fear.

Of course, once Jesus enters the city things settle down – the crowds go back to their day-to-day activities, and the celebration of Passover takes center stage. But

until then, there is this one moment of celebration and praise that gives us a glimpse of what it might be like in heaven.

The Story Before:

However, there is another part of the narrative that often gets missed. To be fair, it doesn't get the same amount of focus in all four gospels that other parts of the triumphant entrance receives, and that might be why it is often overlooked in the Palm Sunday sermons. It's part of the story, but we don't always think about it.

Jesus, not the crowds nor any of the disciples, is setting the stage for the triumphant entrance. He will be entering as a king, as the Messiah that has been looked for, and not as one of the regular crowd. Where it is usually tradition to travel the last mile or so into Jerusalem on foot, Jesus is going to ride a donkey colt – specifically one that has never been ridden before. There is a sign of victory in this action, and also a separating of the reign of Jesus from that of human rulers, in that while Jesus (as king) can commandeer any animal he wants, he does not just take to possess, but with the expectation (and promise) to return the animal. Grace is already at work in these early preparations. In the instructions given to the disciples, Jesus is demonstrating his foresight and knowledge of what and where that which is needed will be found.

All of this sounds really good and would make for a lovely sermon, or at least a telling of the narrative. In my mind's eye, however, it doesn't seem like it would have been as smooth as Mark (and the other gospel writers) portray it.

Imagine, if you will, the scene playing out. Jesus, knowing what is going to happen – the crowds, the resistance, all of it, sends two of his disciples into the nearby town with clear instruction to untie and return with the first colt they find. Which will happen to be one that has never been ridden, and they will later put the pieces together to realize that Jesus is acting to fulfill Scripture. This sounds a bit sketchy to me. "Go and steal a donkey from someone's yard". But, it will be all right because if someone asks about this, all the disciples have to do is say "The Lord needs it, but He will return it soon." I'm not sure it would have been that

smooth. Here are the disciples heading into town and going over the plan a few times so that they get it straight.

“Right, we are to just saunter into town and nab the first donkey we find.”

“Yup.”

“And you don’t see a problem with that? Maybe one of us should act as a look out and we can try to grab the thing during a time of the day when no one will be around.”

“Seems like a good idea.”

“Just so you know, if we get caught, you get to do all the talking...”

And as they hurriedly try to untie that colt and get out of town as soon as possible, sure enough, they are spotted and called out by one of the neighbours. We all have a neighbour like this, you know the one that is always watching out the window and keeping track of all the goings on and what people are up to in your neighbourhood? Anyway, out comes this person from their house and confronts the two disciples. Likely it is a loud confrontation. Maybe even loud enough to alert the owner of the colt. Now we have quite the scene taking place on the street.

“Just what do you think you are doing with my colt?”

(with a bit of a nervousness in the voice) “The Lord needs it and will return it soon.”

“Oh, well that makes it all good then... No it doesn’t! The Lord, who? What is it being needed for? The thing hasn’t even been broke yet for anyone to ride, let alone be of any use for doing work like carrying stuff. And besides all that, this is my colt and you are trying to steal it!”

In my imagination, this line of conversation goes on for quite some time, and it would have taken the disciples some time and significant effort to finally convince the owner and the neighbour of their good intentions and the truthfulness of the words that Jesus gave them to say.

One commentator I read suggested that the use of the colt had already been pre-arranged by Jesus with the owner, and the message sent with the disciples was for the benefit of any neighbours who might try to hinder what was going on.

The Lord Needs:

Regardless of what arrangements were made, or how long it actually took for the disciples to convince people that they were not stealing the colt, the simple message is that Jesus had need of a colt, and there was a person in the town who was able to meet that need.

I would like to suggest to you this morning that you have a colt that Jesus needs. Ok, probably not a literal colt tied up in the back yard, but we all do have something that Jesus is asking for the use of. Jesus did not come to earth to do all the work of ministry – He came for the salvation of people. In fact Jesus tells his disciples that they will do more and greater things that He did, and he sent them out into the world to teach people about Him, to make disciples and baptize people. Jesus showed them what was possible, modeled how to relate with people who needed grace and acceptance, and then turned them loose to live that out. But He didn't just set them loose without any tools to work with. No, the Holy Spirit was sent to remind them of what Jesus had taught and what He had shown them. And even more than that, the Holy Spirit gave talents and abilities to them so that they could function more effectively as ambassadors of Christ. Jesus was saying to them "I have need of you. I have need of the wonderful things that you can do, in my name and through the power of the Holy Spirit." And they responded. The book of Acts is filled with examples of ordinary people doing extraordinary things in the service of Christ.

But it doesn't just stop in the book of Acts. These gifts are for the whole church, for all of time. Paul talks about the church being the body of Christ, and we are that church. He talks about each part of that body having unique and special skills that complement other parts of the body. The uniqueness of people works together for the glory of God. We are those unique people, with unique talents, gifts, and skills that not only come from God, but that He is telling us He needs to

make use of. I am not saying that God is manipulating us. I am saying that In God's kingdom and economy, we each have value and purpose for things that are greater than our own selves.

The question is what are you going to do when Jesus tells you he needs you to use what you are gifted with? All too often, we fail to recognize those gifts, or we think that what we can offer isn't as good as someone else's gift and so we don't bother. Or we don't know how to use the gift. Or we don't see how it can be used because there just doesn't seem to be the right opportunity. Those are all excuses. I'm not saying they are not real, just that they are. They are excuses that Satan feeds us in order to get in the way of the good works that God is inviting us into. But God speaks over and against them. Listen to what Peter has to say in 1 Peter 4:10-11:

"God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen."

Peter is not saying only these two gifts matter; they are only examples. Every talent, every skill, every passion that we have is a gift from God to bring joy to our lives, and to benefit and bless other people. There are situations all the time that God needs your particular set of gifts for. He has set the stage for you to act, and for those actions to bring glory to Him through the blessing of others. Using our gifts is not a whim of God's, that He forgets about and abandons. This is His plan.

Some of you have been given the gift of time. Jesus needs you to use that. Others have been given the gift of helping, or of prayer. Others of you might have the ability to drive people to appointments. Some might have the gift of teaching. Some of having less financial burden, and thus you can bless those with financial burdens. Some of you have an above normal understanding of people, and the

ability to create a safe place where someone else will be able to unload their burdens and worries.

So, what is it that you have – talent, gift, resource, etc., about which God is saying to you “I need this, will you please allow it to be used?” Will you allow God to use you, and the passions you have, to further His kingdom? Don’t be afraid to let God make use of those things, because you will be blessed through it as well.

“The Lord has need of you.”

Let’s pray.