

Well, today is Palm Sunday when we stand at the doorway to the most memorable week in Jesus’ earthly life. Jesus is at the gates of Jerusalem near the end of His earthly ministry and His destination with the cross. On this day, Jesus receives the kind of welcome that we all hope that He will always receive. The disciples place their garments on the donkey for a saddle, and the people spread their coats along the road while others wave palm branches to prepare the way for Jesus’ arrival into Jerusalem. Not only that, but the crowd shouts: “Hosanna,” which means “save us.” Let’s face it, this is exactly what we all want Jesus to do – save us. The crowd also cheers: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Now we know the stories of Holy Week so well that sometimes we tend to run ahead and get to the ending on Easter morning and skip over all the critical events during the week. We all like stories with happy endings, so we go directly from shouting “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” to singing *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today* on Easter morning. We don’t like to think about the betrayal, the arrest, the trial, the suffering, or the crucifixion. But let’s be honest; you cannot truly appreciate all that Jesus did for us without experiencing all the moods and events of this Passion Week. So, I strongly encourage you to attend the Maundy Thursday Drama on *The Living Last Supper* and the Good Friday Service *The Nails of the Cross this week*.

Jesus’ triumphant entry is one of the few events that is recorded in all four gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This will be a week of changing moods for the people of Jerusalem and the disciples. Let’s see how the Gospel of Luke records it in the nineteenth chapter, verses 28-40.

Read Luke 19:28-40

Now we are all familiar with Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and over the years, we have listened to many sermons that have discussed why Jesus came to Jerusalem, how this fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament, how the mood of the crowd changed during the week from shouts of “hosanna” on Palm Sunday to cries of “crucify Him” on Good Friday, and how the rocks were ready to cry out “Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” But have you ever looked at this story from the perspective of the guy who owned the donkey. In the Gospels of Matthew and John, there is no mention of anybody questioning what the disciples were doing. However, Luke tells us that as the disciples were untying the donkey, they were confronted by the owner. In the Gospel of Mark, it says that some of the people in crowd asked them what they were doing.

Here are two strangers coming up and untying this man’s donkey, his prized possession, and walking away with it to who knows where. The Bible does not say in any of the Gospel accounts

which two disciples these were. It could have been Peter, James, or John since they were in Jesus' inner circle. Or it could have been Andrew and Philip since they were always making preparations or bringing people to Jesus. It definitely was not Judas because he would have probably sold the donkey and pocketed the money; or Thomas because he would have asked a lot of questions and never got the job done. But whoever it was, you must remember that this was a motley crew who looked rough and unclean from all their travels with Jesus. Most of them were fishermen and this situation certainly would certainly have smelled a little fishy.

Luke tells us that the owner of the donkey asked the disciples: "Why are you untying my donkey?" Now that's a logical question considering the circumstances. The disciples replied: "The Lord needs it." RIGHT! How would you like it if I came to your house and started driving away in your SUV, your pickup truck, or even your John Deere tractor, and as I drove off, I told you that the Lord needs it? You would probably be calling the police right away or back home in South Carolina I would be dodging buckshot and running for my life.

Now when I get to heaven, I want to sit down with this guy and ask him several questions such as: 1) did you already know Jesus; 2) was all of this pre-arranged beforehand; 3) was the phrase "The Lord needs it" a pre-determined code; 4) how did it feel to see those strangers walking away with your donkey; 5) how did it feel later that day seeing Jesus riding into Jerusalem through the cheering crowd on your donkey; 6) finally, by the way, did they ever return your donkey?

You know the Bible is full of people who have loaned their donkeys to the service of the Lord. Individuals who did little things that made a difference for the Lord and contributed to the building of His kingdom. There is Pharaoh's daughter who takes in the baby Moses from the Nile River and raises him as her son. There's Ruth staying with her mother-in-law Naomi to care for her. There's the little boy with the 5 loaves and 2 fishes that fed over 5000 people. There are the four friends of the paralyzed man who tear open the roof to lower him down to be healed by Jesus. There's Simon carrying the cross for Jesus on the way to Calvary on Good Friday. And there's Joseph providing a tomb as the temporary resting place for the body of Jesus.

We could go on and on; and I know that you could identify others that I didn't mention. The point is that all these people, when given the opportunity, answered the call to serve the Lord with whatever talents and resources that they had. And these acts of service and sacrifice are not limited to stories in the Bible but have and still do occur in everyday life.

Here's an example of how simple acts interact according to God's will to build His kingdom. In the 19th Century, a Sunday School teacher led a Boston shoe clerk to Christ. Most of us have never heard the name of this teacher who by the way was Ed Kimbell. But most of us know the

name of the shoe clerk who accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior – he was Dwight L. Moody.

Now the story does not end here. Moody became a great evangelist preacher and had a major influence on a young minister named Frederick B. Meyer. Meyer began to preach on college campuses and while doing so, he converted Billy Sunday, a former baseball player, to Jesus Christ. Later he arranged for Billy Sunday to come to Charlotte, North Carolina, to conduct a revival. A group of Charlotte community leaders were so enthusiastic following that revival that they planned another one and brought in Mordecai Hamm to preach. At that particular revival a young man named Billy Graham came forward and gave his life to Jesus Christ, and as the late Paul Harvey would say, now you know the rest of the story.

Did that Sunday School teacher in Boston have any idea what impact his lessons would have on the shoe clerk and the domino effect that it would have on Christianity in America? I doubt it. He, like the owner of the donkey, had a chance to open the door of another heart for Jesus, and he did it.

Each of us are called to give Jesus our donkey – now I don't mean an actual donkey unless you just happen to have one in your backyard, but something that we process. When we accepted Jesus into our hearts and came forward to join the church, we were asked: "Will you faithfully participate in the ministries of this church by your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service and your witness?" These are our donkeys – our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. And Jesus expects our total commitment in this, not a half-hearted effort or just when it's convenient to us.

It reminds me of the story of the chicken and the pig who were walking past a church building one day when they noticed the Sunday morning sermon title posted on the sign out front of the church. It said: "What can we do to help the poor?" As they continued to walk down the road, the chicken suddenly came up with an idea: "Say, Brother Pig, why don't we give all the poor people a nice breakfast of ham and eggs?" The pig thought for a moment and replied: "Well, that's all right for you to say because for you it's only a contribution, but for me it's a total commitment." God doesn't want just our contributions; He wants our total commitment.

One day a little child was playing with his mother's valuable vase when he got his hand stuck inside it. So, he ran to his father for help. The father tried in vain to dislodge the boy's hand, but couldn't. They were thinking of breaking the vase when the father said: "Son, let's try one more thing. Open your hand and hold your fingers out straight as you see me doing and then pull your hand out." To his astonishment, the little boy replied: "But, dad, I can't do that, I'll drop my penny." Now we are smiling, but in reality, we are all a lot like that little boy, so busy

holding on to the worthless pennies of this world that we fail to open our hands to the Lord and really see what is important in life.

Billy Graham said that God has given us two hands – one to receive with and the other to give with. We are not basins made for hoarding; we are channels made for sharing. What God wants most is our obedience, our lives devoted to Him as an acceptable sacrifice. Have we given God our all? Are we giving to the Lord out of abundance or what's leftover? Do we hold back from the Lord or do we give Him our best?

God uses small acts of service to reap great harvests. It is on the backs of donkeys that He rides – not thoroughbreds – just simple donkeys. No sower of seeds can know the extent of his or her harvest. The guy with the donkey didn't. God's kingdom is built one stone at a time – one act of kindness, one act of service, one act of obedience, and one act of acceptable sacrifice.

Over the past Sundays of Lent, we have been discussing the spiritual practices of quiet time, prayer, Bible Study, and fasting. Last week during our discussion on serving, I referred to the book *A Hole in Our Gospel*. Remember the key point – if your faith does not have an outward expression, it has a hole in it. This hole applies to not only our service, but to the giving of our time and resources. For it is in giving that we truly receive. Where do you spend the majority of your time? Does Jesus get His fair share or just what's left over after you have satisfied your personal desires.

Now let me just briefly touch on the final donkey – the one most people don't want to talk about – giving. I know some of you don't want to hear it, but your spiritual growth and personal relationship with the Lord depends on how willing you are to trust God with your financial resources. In the Lord's Prayer, we ask: "Give us our daily bread." In other words, we are saying that we will trust that God will give us what we need for each day. But this is not a one-way street where God gives and we hoard His blessings and use them for our personal possessions and desires. We are to pass God's blessings on to others.

Our giving reveals who really controls our heart. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6:21 – "For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be." Does God get His fair share or just what's left over after we satisfy our personal needs. Are we robbing God? God does not just look at what you give; He also looks at what you keep. The closer you grow to the Lord, the more you are willing to trust Him with all that you have. Over the years, I have found that the more you give, the more that will come back to you, because God is the greatest giver in the universe, and He won't let you out give Him. Go ahead and try. See what happens.

We are meant to share what God has given us with others to make their lives better. Remember what Albert Outler said in last week's message: "The world hears the gospel when it sees it." The deeds you do may be the only sermon that some people will ever hear. We are to

share God's love and that includes His financial blessings to make this a better world. As a church, we do that through our mission and outreach programs. Are you willing to provide more donkeys for the Lord?

Are you ready to let your donkey go? The Lord needs it. He needs your time, talents, service, and gifts so that others may be blessed as you are. If you close your eyes, I bet that you can see Jesus riding into Jerusalem and onto the cross and glory, riding into another heart on your donkey. Hosanna in the highest; blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed are those who give their donkeys to the Lord. Amen