

The Donkey and Palm Sunday

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious is he; humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9

It was just another ordinary day at first. The young colt of a donkey was tethered by his mother at the hitching post, and it was a beautiful, peaceful, simple sight.

Everything changed when the two disciples of Jesus showed up. The donkey and his mother were cast in a cosmic drama which was about to change the world forever.

From their life as beasts of burden and plowing fields, they were now to be at the forefront of yet another moment when God spoke to the world. The colt was to carry Jesus in a procession of palm branches and celebration into Jerusalem. The crowds shouted and the children cheered. “Hosanna to the king! Hosanna in the highest heaven! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

This was not the first time a donkey had figured in God’s plan for his people. Thousands of years ago the prophet Balaam was about to be killed as he rode his donkey down the road. God made the donkey swerve to avoid certain death, and then to speak. “Am I not the same donkey that you have ridden all your life? Have I ever done anything like this before?” That day God opened Balaam’s eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing before him with a drawn sword.

God uses ordinary moments to remind us of his purpose being high above ours. Palm Sunday reminds us that God sent Jesus to save us, that he is our true king above all kings, and that he died so that we might live. Every other thing—business, family, vacation, recreation, and even opinions, are secondary to that.

Many years before Balaam, and thousands of years before Jesus came to die on the cross for us, God asked Abraham to take his son Isaac and sacrifice him for an offering to God. So Abraham got up early, saddled his donkey, took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and went to the place God had told him.

He believed God, God provided an animal for the sacrifice. The important thing is that he saddled his donkey.

Saddling the donkey means taking the physical step of following through when God tells us to do something. In today's world we are so busy doing our own thing that we don't have time for God. Abraham reminds us that taking time for God takes precedence over everything else.

God reminds us in Exodus that we are to do our work in six days, and rest ourselves and our donkey, and worship on the seventh day. He calls us to see Sundays as the most important day and to see God's worship and work as what we do as Christians before we live the rest of life.

Tradition, not scripture, portrays Mary the mother of Jesus on a donkey as she went to Bethlehem to birth her baby Jesus at the stable. The "Flight to Egypt" is a famous statue of Mary and her young son Jesus on a donkey when they went there to avoid the wrath of the evil King Herod.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode on a little donkey to be seen as the king of kings, entering as a king entered the city after a victory. Ironically, he was entering a few days before the final victory of the cross, and his resurrection three days later on Easter.

The two disciples untied the donkey and brought him to Jesus that day. What needs to be untied in our hearts that we can bring to Jesus on this Palm Sunday, a week before Easter?

Do we need to be untied from guilt? Are we tied down by the need to forgive? Are we focusing too much on ourselves and not enough on God? Have we met Jesus as Savior, or do we see him from afar, as the Palm Sunday crowd did?

Palm Sunday is the day when we are unloosed to see and do the work of Jesus. It is a day which many skip over in practice, but without it the events which set in motion the cross of Calvary miracle would not have happened.

Perhaps we must find the humility and spiritual stature of the tiny, often forgotten donkey. We must take up the cross, and when things are in their proper place, stop trying to carry Jesus and let him carry us.

Are we still tethered at our worldly owner's corral, or are we on a journey to spectacular places and miraculous situations we have never seen before? Have we found that the spiritual realm, the knowing of Jesus, and the work he calls us to do is more important than anything else? If we have, we will find ourselves in church not just on Easter, but every other Sunday of the year as well. And we will find a journey with Jesus we never thought possible!