

The Lord Needs It...

Luke 19:28-40

Rev. Stephen H. Wilkins
Georgetown Presbyterian Church
March 28, 2010

Every once in a while, either because of the occasion being celebrated in the church year, or because of the choice of text from the Bible, the pastor is faced with multiple options in terms of which direction to take the sermon. Today presents one of those occasions. The truth is, Palm Sunday gives the preacher many different options. Do I preach the traditional story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem? Do I focus on the excitement of the crowds of people, and the festive welcome that Jesus receives? And if so, do I focus on the irony that the same crowds that hailed Jesus as king today will cry for his crucifixion in just a few days? Do I focus on what it means to ascribe to Jesus the title of King and Savior?

Or, because technically today is also Passion Sunday, do I take you this morning down the road to Good Friday? Do we go ahead and focus on the cross today? I have mixed emotions about doing that, because I would like for us to journey together with Jesus through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday before we get to Easter next Sunday. But I realize that for some of you that is not possible, and so today may be the last time before Easter that you hear the message of the cross proclaimed in church.

But today I have chosen a somewhat different focus. I have chosen a detail that is mentioned in three of the four gospels, but is often overlooked. Yet without this detail, the entire parade of palms that is so often our focus would not have taken place. I'm referring to the donkey, and to the owner who lent the donkey to the Lord because the Lord had a need for it.

At the beginning of the story, Jesus gave some instructions to his disciples. He instructed them to go into Jerusalem ahead of him, and to find a colt (really, a donkey), that has never been ridden. He told his disciples, "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 [donkey], its owner asked them, 'Why are you untying the [donkey]?' They said, 'The Lord needs it.'"¹ Then they took the donkey, presumably because the owner agreed to let the Lord use it.

Without the permission of the donkey's owner, the parade of palms does not take place. Without the donkey, scripture is not fulfilled. It seems like such a small detail, yet the story of our salvation does not unfold according to scripture if that detail is omitted.

Do you think the owner of the donkey knew what hinged on whether or not he would allow the disciples to take the donkey? Do you think he had any idea that, had he denied the request of the disciples, there would be no parade, no triumphal entry into Jerusalem by Jesus?

I don't think so.

I think the only consideration that the owner had to make was how he was going to respond to the words, "The Lord needs it."

¹ Luke 19:30-34

The Lord needs it...

How about you—What do you do when you hear those words?

There are two things that strike me about those words. The first is that we ought not ever – not EVER – believe that we are of no use to the Lord. If Jesus can take a simple, ordinary donkey, and use it in his plan of redemption, don't you think that Jesus can use us, as well? It's a shame that in our world we limit the usefulness of people to a certain span of years, or to specific qualifications. The truth is, our Lord does not call only those who are qualified to participate in his plan of redemption, but he does qualify those who are called. If the Lord can use a donkey as his preferred mode of transportation, don't you think that he can use each of us as a part of his extraordinary plan for this world?

The truth is, the Bible is full of simple, ordinary people, people with a questionable past, people that had been chewed up and tossed aside by the world in which they lived. Consider a short list of some of the heroes of the Bible, and the ways the Bible describes them for us. Noah was a drunk, Isaac was a daydreamer, Jacob was a liar, Leah was ugly, Joseph was abused, Gideon was afraid, Samson was a long-haired hippie and a womanizer, Rahab was a prostitute, Ruth was a foreigner, Jeremiah was too young, Isaiah preached naked, Jonah ran away from God, John the Baptist ate bugs, Peter denied Christ, the disciples ran away, Martha worried about everything, the Samaritan woman at the well was divorced (more than once), Zacchaeus was too short, Paul was a zealot against the disciples, and Lazarus was dead!

What a list! They are ordinary people, with the same kinds of faults we find in this very room today (except maybe not for the preaching style of Isaiah!). Yet they are people who nevertheless turn out to be pivotal heroes in the story of our faith. Erase even one of them from the pages of the Bible, and the story of our redemption is incomplete. They become heroes of our faith, not because of who they are in and of themselves, but because of what God does through them.

Don't ever buy into the lie that the Lord can't use you. The Lord needs you.

The second thing that comes to mind when I hear the words, "The Lord needs it," is that there is a response required. We don't know anything about the owner of the donkey, except that he owned the donkey. But when he heard the words, "The Lord needs it," he did not hesitate to give to the Lord what the Lord needed. It is an example of humble obedience and anonymous discipleship. It is, in a marvelous way, an example of quiet, faithful stewardship. It is a shining example of what can happen when we place whatever we have and whoever we are into the hands of the Lord.

Earlier, we confirmed 10 young men and women into the membership of the church. But confirmation is more than just "joining the church", as if it were some kind of club. In confirmation those eighth graders professed their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and their Lord. And then they promised to be Christ's faithful disciples, obeying his Word and showing his love. In putting their faith in Jesus, they recognize that they need Jesus to be their Savior. In promising to be faithful disciples, obeying Jesus' Word and showing his love, they demonstrate that Jesus needs them, as well. The Lord needs them... to be faithful in proclaiming his gospel through their lives.

In less than two weeks, ten people from this church will travel to the Greensboro area to work at Peacehaven Farm. Peacehaven Farm is a ministry started by Susan Gillespie Elliott, a child of this church. It will be a residential community for disabled and handicapped individuals, providing them with a vocation and a home. Peacehaven Farm is the result of a vision of a woman and her family who heard Jesus say,

“The Lord needs you...” And those who are going next week to work at Peacehaven are going because they have heard Jesus say, “The Lord needs you.”

Every week in the bulletin you will find announcements of some ministry or activity that needs some kind of help. Each announcement is a way of telling you, “The Lord needs you...”

Debbie will be fixing a meal for Habitat for Humanity work teams on Tuesday, and she could use some help: The Lord needs you.

The Senior High youth have a lock-in scheduled for this Friday evening, and Bruce needs chaperones to help with the transportation and stay the night: The Lord needs you.

The Children’s ministry will be dying eggs on Wednesday, and hosting an Easter Egg hunt on Saturday: The Lord needs you.

My friends, the work of the Lord is ongoing. As far as we’re concerned, the work of the Lord never ends. Today, the Lord needs you. And tomorrow. And the next day. And the next...

We’re here today because our Lord chose a donkey as his mode of transportation into the city that would crucify him. We’re here today because an anonymous owner of that donkey heard Jesus’ disciples say, “The Lord needs it,” and so he gave to the Lord what the Lord needed.

In the midst of the celebration of Palm Sunday, as we shout, “Hosanna, Save us!”, as we consider what Jesus does for us on Maundy Thursday, and then on the Cross on Friday, and as we consider the hope that is born in us through Christ’s resurrection from the dead, let me suggest that you also consider what you can do for him.

The Lord needs you.

What will you do?