



“THE LORD NEEDS ME” – MATTHEW 21:1-11, NRSVUE

A Palm Sunday Sermon

By: Reverend Jarrett Britton Washington

The biblical narrative of Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem is on full display in the gospel of Matthew. Differently than the accounts portrayed in Mark and Luke, the Matthew text is the only gospel to reference the presence of two donkeys. The gospel according to Mark references the presence of a colt; while the Luke writer references a young donkey. In both instances the reader is only exposed to one animal. The gospel according to Matthew is one riddled with details. In fact, the details of the text help to paint a specific picture about a life that was soon to come to an end, only to be resurrected with great power.

Matthew closely mimics the prophetic text of the minor prophet Zechariah where the prophet writes, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”¹ Matthew’s interpretation is meant to be a literal view of what had already been prophesized so many years before. The meticulous nature of the Matthew text helps the reader to understand the importance of having all the details when painting the full picture of Jesus Christ.

By this time in the text there is no question as to what Jesus is setting out to do in Jerusalem. Although there were those who questioned his nature, authority, and ultimately, position; there was a sense of confidence around him that this is what he was born to do. Jesus’ divine nature helps all to understand that he had dominion over all the creatures of the earth and therefore could use them as he pleases. His command to his disciples was to go into the village and find a

¹ Zechariah 9:9, NRSVue

colt and a donkey and bring them to him. The presence of both the colt and the donkey was significant to the carrying out of the prophetic word pronounced by Zechariah. To have both the colt and the donkey purposed that the colt would feel more comfortable leaving with the presence of the older donkey, more than likely its mother.

We find in life there are some things that just cannot be done alone. The truth is that there are times in each one of our lives that our comfortability will be tested, and the very knowledge of having the support of someone makes the journey easier. Thus, with the presence of both the colt and the donkey Jesus places his cloaks on them and rides into the city.

While riding into the city the reader sees the triumphant entry of Jesus, the joyful praises of his disciples, the happy expressions of the people, and the vexed spirit of the Pharisees. It is at this moment that every believer should understand that everyone is not going to be happy with the places you are going in life. Life is a teacher that sometimes you will have people in a posture of excitement while there are others in a position of angst.

Christ and his disciples are experiencing one of the most profoundly proud moments in their lives. They are walking through the city of Jerusalem. It was almost symbolic of the picture painted by the hymnologist who wrote, *we shall see the glory of the Lord, walking in the King's highway.*² The absolute majesty of his presence provoked the people to lay down their cloaks on the rugged path of dirt and rock and for others to peel off the branches of the palm trees and lay them at the feet of the colt and the donkey as Jesus entered into the city. The cries of the people said, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"³

All of what begins to happen during and after Jesus' triumphant entry is predicated by the idea that Jesus told the disciples "the Lord needs them."⁴ Voila! There it is! Nothing happens in life for us, and through us, unless the Lord has need of us. In the other iterations of this very text,

² "Walking in the King's Highway" by Florence Horton, 1906

³ Matthew 21:9, NRSVue

⁴ Matthew 21:3a, NRSVue

the writers use the word, “untie them.” The essence remains the same. If you want to be used by God you have to be needed by God and ultimately untied by God.

The reality of life teaches that many times we are trapped, tied up and locked down by the very issues of this life. Yet, when we get free, God can stand tall in us and through us, and use us. The word of God says, “whom the son sets free is free indeed.”⁵ Your freedom is not for your own use, but rather you are set free so that God can truly use you. In the text its not simply a donkey and a colt, it is God’s way of using God’s creation for God’s glory.

When God unties you, God is simply saying God is not through with you yet. Untied and free people have a testimony that everything I say and I do is for the glory of God. Today, we find there are too many people who are tied up when the Lord has need of them. Haven’t you heard, *must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free, no there is a cross for everyone and there is a cross for you and for me?*⁶ Yes, he is a burden bearer and a burden lifter, but the idea is that we all still will have burdens to bear even in our needed state.

Never forsake the part of your journey where you are needed. Even in your untied state of affairs, you will endure the ups and the downs of this life. Some days people will be shouting praise in your direction and other days they will be discussing your demise. God has not called us to a problem free life, but God has called us to a needed position. The donkey and the colt of the Matthew text represent those of us who have been called to carry the gospel. Our lives are full of purpose, yet set up to fulfill a need. Our roles do not make us less than, but rather they elevate the very desires of our heart.

The essence of Palm Sunday is that we are being set up for a Resurrection morning. The trick of the enemy is that we would live for the “Hosanas” when we really should be preparing for the resurrection moments. We ought not just seek the mountaintop experiences and forsake the learning opportunities we find in the valleys. Thomas Keller makes the argument that

⁵ John 8:36, NRSVue

⁶ “Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone” Thomas Shepherd, 1693

“Spiritual resurrection means that we are, in a sense, living in heaven while still on earth, living in the future while still being in the present.”⁷ We should all seek moments of resurrection for in these moments we get closer to understanding why God has need of us.

On this Palm Sunday every believer ought to be reminded that God still has need of them. The need is not because God can’t do it without you, but the truth is God wants you to be a part of this next move in the kingdom. The crosses we each face are crosses God has designed us to bear. What has not destroyed you, has only encouraged you.

Let the true essence of being needed by God remind you that when doctors have given up, God still provides hope. When the jury is out for deliberation, God has already settled the case. When the eviction notice has hit the door, God has already provided the next place to rest. Why? Because the Lord still has a need of you.

Let this Palm Sunday be a reminder that the two donkeys (the colt and the donkey) of the Matthew gospel give us Jesus a king, the very fulfilment of the ancient prophecy by the prophet Zechariah. He literally goes from the Palms to the Passion because the cross is always present when the true need has been identified. Unlike when Jesus heals the sick and raises the dead, the crowd turns and asks the question, “who is this man?” And the resounding answer is “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”⁸ Today, we can truly say, that the same man who rode into Jerusalem is the same man who has need of us today.

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⁷ Hope in the Times of Fear: The Resurrection and the Meaning of Easter, Viking 2021, Thomas Keller, pg 119

⁸ Matthew 21:10, NRSVue