

The Donkey Made the Difference

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Today with Palm Sunday we move into the last week of Jesus' life on earth beginning with this triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Much has been written about Jesus' purpose, and how the crowd had one expectation of Jesus, and how the victory Jesus would win was a spiritual victory; not the kind of victory the crowds assumed it would be. The crowds expected Jesus to bring on a political upheaval that would rescue them from the oppressive Romans.

How many of you, when you have prayed or sought the Lord have had times when you have been absolutely sure that God was doing a certain thing in your life, or in someone else's life, and then...surprise...surprise...it just didn't work out the way you thought it was going to? Your expectation of what God would do was totally different than what transpired.

I can say that I have been in that situation many times. And what I have learned is that often I want God to do a great big thing –with thunder and lightening and earth shaking repercussions...Kind of like the crowds wanting a great big political riot....certainly not a cross....

I mean he's God right? God ought to be able to do a big deal...

But what I have found, that is so moving, and so characteristic is that the God of the universe...*does* do a big deal time and time again but he Manages to do it working through the smallest, most humble things, that I tend to ignore...

And do you know who one of the most ignored characters in the Bible is – that I have never heard anyone ever preach on, on any Palm Sunday?

It's the donkey that Jesus rides into Jerusalem. So I am taking this on this morning – if you know me you know I am a horse lover – so this was a fun talk to get ready for you.

Cause I believe, if people in that crowd had paid attention to the donkey, If they had taken a moment to ponder the meaning that donkeys had back then, in the ancient world, they would have had a much better idea of what God was about to do in Jesus.

If we want to get a better idea of how God is working in our lives...we need to look at the *humble things* around us. The small things, we need to look at the things people are not paying attention to...Cause so often God uses the weak things of the world, the things people do not think are very important, to communicate his love and intentions for us.

Now if you were a party planner, and were given the task to orchestrate the triumphal entry of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords into Jerusalem I just bet – if you were a decent party planner - you would think of the most beautiful way to present him to the waiting crowd. You probably would choose... a prancing, majestic horse – something like maybe Secretariat. (That is not Jesus riding him in case you were wondering)



This is a horse worthy of Kings. He stood out above the rest. He did amazing work and ended up winning the Triple Crown back in 1973. He is well known from the movie...

More recently American Pharoah won the Triple Crown in 2015.



There's American Pharoah. That's not Jesus riding American Pharoah either.

But American Pharoah is a TB. TB's are beautiful animals...actually I stupidly used to ride TB's off the track. They are wonderful, highly tuned animals that respond to the slightest touch or movement of your body. Riders love them because you can just turn your head, change your position slightly... and the horse will respond and go that direction.

That's the kind of animal Kings and Princes deserve! That's the kind of animal Prince Charming rides in on Disney movies. - a white stallion... right?



Now, shift set. Think of a donkey.

How do you compare a majestic animal like a TB to a donkey?



Slow, plodding, big ears,, stubborn, awkward. Sure footed yes, but hardly a big deal.

It was an animal for the poor. It was an animal that often did hard labor. And It was an animal like this, that Jesus rode into Jerusalem. And not only that, but Jesus was very intentional with his disciples about getting this donkey to ride...WHY?

Its because **This donkey symbolized what God was doing. It was a message to the people about the plan of salvation.** As I said, If people had paid more attention to the donkey they would not have had the wrong expectation for Jesus' coming into Jerusalem that day.

So let's pay attention to this underrated donkey for just a minute....

1. ***If people had paid attention to the donkey they would have realized that this donkey was a fulfillment of ancient prophecy....***

The powerful words of the prophet Zechariah, that Hannah read to us, were spoken 100's of years before Jesus ever rode into Jerusalem

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

If they had looked at the donkey they would have paused perhaps and remembered that Zechariah had said this – and they might have thought – perhaps Jesus as King might have had a bigger purpose than just overthrowing the Romans. But they didn't think that – not even for one minute. ***Because no one was paying attention to the donkey.***

2. If people had paid attention to the donkey, they would have realized that Christ was seeking them out humbly...

Notice the words of Zechariah...**YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU HUMBLY TODAY....**

This was Martin Luther's point when he preached on this text years ago....He said "Look... Jesus comes to us. This is God's initiative...We didn't go out and find God. God found us and out of his great love for us he comes to us in Christ...not as we would expect, but in humility.

Not on a TB stallion, snorting and prancing as a human King would ride, but rather on a beast of burden, he seeks us out..

But the people didn't get it did they?

Cause no one was paying attention to the donkey...

How is God coming to you today...in the small humble ways maybe you haven't taken notice of yet?

3. If people had paid attention to the donkey they would have realized that Christ's mission and purpose was one of peace not war.

In the ancient Middle Eastern world, leaders rode horses if they rode to war, but donkeys - ONLY if they came in peace.

1 Kings 1:33 mentions Solomon riding a donkey on the day he was recognized as the new king of Israel.

Zechariah 9:10 (right after our text Hannah read) highlights that peace: “I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He (Jesus) will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth.”.

This peace that Christ brings is a fulfillment of the angels' proclamation in Luke 2:14: “**Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace...”.**

Jesus came to us to bring peace and reconciliation between us and God.

The donkey tells us this - because leaders riding a donkey back then, were all about peace. *But no one was paying attention to the donkey.*

4. If people had paid attention to the donkey they might have

considered that perhaps Jesus was coming to bring us a new covenant (a new agreement between God and people). Because, In addition to symbolizing peace in Biblical times, donkeys were also often used when a new treaty was being formed, or a new agreement was being reached between two parties. Clearly, in Jesus, there was going to be a new agreement between humanity and God once Jesus sacrificed himself for our sins. People might have thought about that – that perhaps a new treaty or a new agreement was in the making when Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. But guess what? No one got it... ***No one was paying attention to the donkey.***

5. Finally, If people had paid attention to the donkey they would have recognized that Jesus identified with the poor and that he came into Jerusalem as a servant. A donkey was an animal that even the poorest of the poor could afford. Jesus didn't come in with an entourage of donkeys – 50 donkeys maybe - that the rich would have had. He came in on just one simple donkey. This identification with the poor was not the posture of one who had come to be a strong political leader charging in to defeat the Romans. It was the posture of one who although he was the King of King and Lord of Lords, came all the way down the “ladder” as we talked about last Sunday...and was completely surrendered to God’s will for him, trusting God every step of the way. Jesus, riding in on a donkey

was saying, "I am God's servant. I have come to do God's will, not my own."

You see, in that culture, **Kings would be degraded if they rode through the main gates of a city on a donkey!** Kings would come into the city on big flashy chariots or on TB. **Yet, the servants of the kings, as they would enter the city, would often accompany the kings on donkeys.**

Jesus was God's servant, sent to obey his will. He rides a donkey to tell us this.

But the people didn't get that because...why?

(Let People say this...then put it up) **No one was paying attention to the donkey!**

So in our own lives today, let's not miss the humble ways that God communicates himself and his love to us. Let's be attentive to what the world might think is insignificant, not worthy of our time.

Maybe it's the prattle of a young child people tend to ignore, but who is just delighted in a ladybug – and that by paying attention - listening we can get in touch with the truth that God cares about every small detail of our life.

Or how important it is to take joy in simple things.

Or perhaps it's the person everyone is ignoring -- on the corner with the

sign that says “HELP ME” that everyone walks by, who might teach us something about the underside of life and renew compassion in us, if we just stopped to notice, talk to him or her, have a conversation.

Or maybe the urging of the Holy Spirit, often so easy to ignore, to write the email to encourage this or that person, to go and be alone to pray, to find out about someone you haven’t seen in a long time. It is easy to ignore, to not pay attention to the prompting of the Holy Spirit but when we do pay attention, wonderful things happen and God is able to communicate to us.

I want to close with a story about Jane. Jane is an older woman in a nursing home whom I sometimes visit. Nursing homes are places people generally don’t pay attention to. Jane has a vacant look in her eyes most times and usually sits alone in her wheelchair in the corner of the common area. Again...No one pays too much attention to Jane. She is easy to ignore. She can only speak a few words - unless she sings. So when I visit, I bring the guitar and we always sing her song. The song she loves to sing is “You Are My Sunshine.” I bring my guitar when I visit older people because. singing taps into a different part of the brain, and the long term memory – the words to songs learned long ago – stays intact, way after short term memory is gone.

But most people ignore Jane, because she cannot talk to them – she can only say a few words. Two months ago Jane's son came to visit. I happened to be there that day and I noticed as I visited with others in the common area, that they were sitting in silence together. The son looked awkward and both of them sat there with their eyes averted from one another. I was in a hurry, as usual, and I wanted to leave. However, that day, the Holy Spirit urged me...go over there. Pay attention to Jane. This time I listened.

"Hi Jane," I said walking with the guitar. "Would you like to sing your song for your son...you are my Sunshine."

"Yes." She said simply - her eyes brightened
So we started to sing together.

You are my sunshine. My only sunshine.

You make me happy, when skies are gray...

And then it happened. When we got to the next part she turned and met the eyes of her son, pointing at him again and again as she sang the words,

"You'll never know dear, how much I love you."

The son looked up at her, met her gaze and I noticed his eyes were filled with tears.

"Thank you Mom," he said. "Thank you."

Folks, pay attention to the weak things, the humble things, the frail things,

the small things, that the world ignores. It is so often through those things that God communicates his love and intention to us. Let Us Pray...