

The Lord Needs It
Luke 19:28-40
April 14, 2019 (Palm Sunday)
First Presbyterian, Luling

Many of us may have a vision of Palm Sunday in our heads, and it probably looks remarkably like that first hymn we sang today, “Hosanna, Loud Hosanna.” The little children are lined up like at the fourth of July parade, on the front row so they can run out and get the candy. Crowds of grownups are behind them. Everybody is waving palm branches that they have somehow obtained from nearby palm trees. As Jesus rides by on the donkey, everyone calls out “Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord,” from Psalm 118.

If we smush all the gospels together, then, yes, this is the picture we get, though the presence of children in particular isn't noted anywhere, though they were probably there with their grownups. But Luke's version of Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem is lacking almost every ingredient, save Jesus and the donkey. There aren't children mentioned. There are no palms. That's right. No palms. There are no crowds—it is a little hard to tell, but it seems like this is mostly an event involving Jesus's disciples, people who followed him already. There are no Hosannas. There is a donkey. Maybe. And there is Jesus, riding the maybe-a-donkey as he enters Jerusalem. On the whole, it's way more low-key than in the other gospels. What do we make of that?

Rather than looking at what seems to be missing from Luke's version of the event, let's look and see what he includes, and why, and what it might have to say to us this morning. It begins as Jesus continues his long journey to Jerusalem. This is the first time, in Luke's telling of his ministry, that he enters Jerusalem. He's never been there before, except as a baby at his circumcision and as a 12 year old left behind at the Temple. Jerusalem signifies, in Luke, the end, the culmination of Jesus's ministry in the cross and resurrection. That Jesus is marching into *Jerusalem* is important, in all of the gospels really, but in Luke especially so.

As they are approaching the city, Jesus sends two disciples ahead. He has done this before, back in chapter 10, sent them out in pairs throughout the region, to all the places he intended to go. And he will do it again, on Thursday of this last week, when he sends a pair to make arrangements for the Last Supper. It seems like a favorite device, to ensure that the disciples have a buddy, to make

sure they follow through with their assignment, to make sure they don't feel alone or lost or uncertain.

Jesus knows, ahead of time, what they will see, what they are to do, how they will be questioned, and what they are to say in response. They'll see a colt—you can see how this is ambiguous—is it a colt like a baby horse? Or a colt like a baby donkey? Just reading this, especially without the Zechariah passage that Janey read in your mind, it sure seems like it could be that Jesus is riding a young horse, but donkey is within the realm of possibility. If you're wondering why in the world that Jesus wants to ride an animal that has never been ridden before, as that seems like a risky endeavor to undertake, well, that's a good question. There are a couple places in the Old Testament where an unbroken animal is used for a special purpose—for a sacrifice, and once to carry the cart that held the ark of the covenant. And the Zechariah passage makes a connection between an unriden animal and royalty. But it isn't a very strong connection.

So these two unnamed disciples will see a colt that hasn't been ridden before. Jesus instructs them to untie it and bring it back. You may also be wondering why Jesus is telling these disciples to steal the colt, because that is sure what it sounds like. Jesus anticipates this contingency, because he says, if someone asks you, "why are you untying it?" just tell them "The Lord needs it."

And then Luke reports the event occurring exactly, down to the precise wording, as Jesus has predicted. They untie the colt; it's owners object and ask them why, and they say, "The Lord needs it." This seems to be a reasonable and understandable and powerful response, because the colt's owners make no further objection, and the disciples return with the colt.

Luke has this exchange between the disciples and the colt's owners in here for a couple of reasons: first, to show that Jesus has complete knowledge, even ahead of time. And if he knows something as insignificant as where they will encounter a colt and what the owner will say, then surely he knows the rest of what is about to happen in Jerusalem, how the week will end. And, by the owner's immediate agreement to the disciples stealing, or, ahem, borrowing the colt, with no more explanation than "The Lord needs it," Luke is demonstrating that Jesus and Jesus's words are more powerful than any earthly idea or concept, and therefore any earthly ruler or king.

When the disciples return to Jesus with the colt, they throw their cloaks on it, and get Jesus seated on it, which must have been tricky. As Jesus rides toward Jerusalem, "people," and this is the only mention of other people besides the disciples as participants in this entrance parade, people spread their cloaks on the

road. Then “the whole multitude of the disciples,” not a huge crowd of strangers, but people who already knew Jesus and whom Jesus already knew, began to praise God using some of the words from Psalm 118: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.” Luke adds “king” rather than “one” here. And they say “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven,” which doesn’t come from the psalm at all but certainly echoes the song of the angels at Jesus’ birth, “Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”

And that’s it. That’s all there is to the big Palm Sunday parade in Luke.

Even as small and probably insignificant to anyone but the disciples, even as small as it is, it still causes a stir. The Pharisees here are not opposed to Jesus, necessarily. In fact, it sounds like they’re worried for him. “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” Don’t cause a stir, don’t attract attention, don’t give the Romans any cause to crack down right now at Passover. It seems like that’s what they’re telling Jesus, but he has no intention of telling the disciples to be quiet. Even if they were quiet, the stones themselves would shout out the truth. He may be talking about the giant stones that formed the base of the Temple Mount, or the Temple itself, or just some stones lying on the ground. The disciples are proclaiming the truth, that Jesus is the king who is bringing peace. And if somehow the disciples are silenced, then the stones themselves will shout, because the Lord needs it.

Last week, I briefly said that we don’t usually think of Jesus *needing* anything, but that maybe he needed Mary’s encouragement and generous gesture of love as he prepared his spirit for his arrest and crucifixion. And now, in a different gospel altogether, Jesus talks about *needing* a colt for his entrance into Jerusalem. Goodness knows that he’s walked a million miles as he traveled about, healing and teaching and preaching, so it’s interesting that for some reason he *needs* this colt. And in some sense, it seems like the colt’s owner *needs* Jesus to *need* something from him, because he certainly gives in quickly, without investigating anything further.

I’m trying to imagine what it would be like to be that colt’s owner. Say I’m in my front yard, pulling weeds. A couple of guys walk down the street, approach my car, get in it, and start it up! I say, “What are you doing?” And they say, “Oh, Jesus needs your car.” And I say sure, ok, go ahead. There is nothing about this scenario that is realistic, including me being in the front yard pulling weeds. No way would I just go ahead and let them take my car because Jesus needed it. I would have been calling 911 before they even opened the car door.

But it's not unrealistic to imagine what it is that Jesus needs from each of us. It could be that Jesus needs a thing, an item, something tangible—car or land or business. It could be that some of our resources—money or time or influence. It could be, as Jesus says in Matthew, that Jesus needs food or drink or clothes or a visit in prison. It could be that Jesus needs our attention and focus. That's probably easier to fulfill this Holy Week than any other week in the year, to give Jesus our attention and focus.

It could be, though, that Jesus needs everything, that Jesus needs it all. Earlier in Luke, Jesus said, "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it." (9:24). The Lord needs our whole lives. The Lord needs all of those things I listed above: tangible things, resources, food, attention. And the Lord needs our very selves. The Lord needs our lives. Jesus needs us to accompany him not just with cloaks and praise and honor, but Jesus needs us to accompany him all the way to the cross. The Lord needs it. The Lord needs you.