



The Avenue Uniting Church

Sunday 24th March, 2024
"A Leader on a donkey"

Listening for Sacred Wisdom

Gospel Story, Mark 11:1-11 (From Story Bible)

"Have you heard about Jesus?" people were saying. "Have you heard about the things he says and does? Everybody knows Jesus!"

Jesus was becoming very famous. Some people began to wonder, "Is Jesus the Messiah? Is this the one GOD promised?"

Many people thought the Messiah would be like an army general. The Messiah would gather soldiers and fight the Romans. The Messiah would kill the people they didn't like.

Some of Jesus' disciples, like Peter, were sure Jesus was the Messiah. But even Peter sometimes thought the Messiah would be a general.

Because Jesus was famous, crowds of people came to see him wherever he went. So Jesus decided to show the people something important. "I am going to go into Jerusalem", Jesus said to his disciples. "I want you to get me a donkey, so I can ride it into the city."

"A donkey? Why not a big, strong horse?"

"No, a donkey. A small, young donkey. I don't want to go into Jerusalem like a general on a horse. I don't want to fight. If I ride on a donkey, people will know that I am coming to bring peace."

The crowds gathered on both sides of the road when they heard Jesus was coming. They cheered and shouted as Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Some of them threw down their clothes so the donkey could walk on something soft. Others cut down some branches from trees for the donkey to walk on.

"Hosanna! Hosanna!" shouted the crowds. Hosanna means "Save us now." Jesus didn't like that. "They still think I'm going to be a general," he thought. "They think I've come to fight the Romans."

Most of the rulers didn't understand Jesus either. They thought a Messiah had to be a general who would fight people. They didn't understand what Jesus was trying to show them, when he rode into the city on a donkey.

When the rulers heard the people shout "Hosanna! Save us now!" they began to feel afraid.

"If Jesus is going to be the Messiah, then he will be the ruler instead of us. We'd better find a way to kill him. Soon!"

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### Contemporary Reading of Grace

Rex Hunt

Palm Sunday at one end, and Good Friday at the other end, reminds us life is not an escape from reality. It draws us into the reality of this world.

Jesus, who is human as we are, and Jesus who is a 'gateway to God', confronts and submits to the worst human beings can do, in order to remain faithful to a vision, a passion, of what the best human beings can be.

This Palm Sunday may we once again reaffirm that religion is not a retreat from life where we ponder the things not of this world...

Religion in general, and Palm Sunday in particular, enables us, with insight and wisdom and power, to meet courageously and creatively the current issues of our ordinary, everyday living.

And to carry with us into that everyday living what is precious: reverence for all life, beauty that displays itself in love, and deep, abiding peace.

Following a leader on a donkey presents us with challenges and a calling: **the challenge of humility.**  
Taking our place in the knowledge that this is where we're called to be,  
not because we are GOD's gift, but because of GOD's gift to us.  
GOD's gift of love about which we cannot be silent.  
GOD's gift of love that we have to model in giving ourselves.

Following a leader on a donkey presents us with challenges and a calling: **the challenge of subversion.**

Finding ways to quietly and peacefully subvert what others perceive as necessary evils so that justice can prevail. Quiet subversion that brings love to the fore.

Following a leader on a donkey presents us with challenges and a calling: **the challenge of vulnerability.**

To sit beside another person in their pain, and share in their distress,  
knowing that it may change us, and invite us into something deeper.

Following a leader on a donkey presents us with challenges and a calling: **the challenge of humour.**

Because life can be bizarre! A 'king', riding a donkey??  
Finding humour even in our toughest moments, as well as the great ones: humour that may just help us and others get through...

Following a leader on a donkey presents us with challenges and a calling: **the challenge of uncertainty.**

Following even though we do not know how or when it is going to end. Because in all the uncertainty is the promise that GOD's love will be enough.

Following a leader on a donkey presents us with challenges and a calling: **the challenge of compassion.**

Being so moved, as Jesus was, about the plight of the world that we can do no other than do whatever it takes to make a difference.

Following a leader on a donkey presents us with challenges and a calling: **the challenge of love.**

That makes us want to serve and, in serving the way of Jesus, and each other,  
finding that love really can change things, and allows us to meet all these challenges head on:  
following our donkey riding leader.

Following a leader on a donkey today, presents us with challenges and a calling - and an invitation:  
**to be still, to put everything else aside now and then:**  
to remember who we are, and to remember the way of the one we follow.

Elsewhere in Jerusalem that day, we believe another procession took place: full of pomp, power, and military presence: a parade of empire, a show of strength and threat. **"Don't mess with us!"** it said.

Such 'parades' continue today, in all kinds of ways and settings.  
But here we are, once again a small group welcoming a man on a donkey.

Here we find other people just like us, challenged with humility, subversion, vulnerability, humour and uncertainty, with the challenges of compassion and love, in a world crying out for these to be seen in the way we live with each other.

The week before us, perhaps like no other, calls us into reflection  
on why we follow the way of Jesus;  
on how it speaks to us of our way in this world,  
and then it invites us, once more, to walk with him and his friends.

So let's be brave, and take our place behind this man and his donkey.

