

Palm Sunday | St. Matthew 21:1-9
April 9, 2017 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Merciful God, heavenly Father, we give You most hearty thanks that You have removed from us the grievous burden of our sins and placed it upon Your dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; and we humbly ask You, govern us by Your Holy Spirit, that we may comfort ourselves with His suffering and death in the face of all temptations, diligently guard against sin and an evil conscience, and finally obtain eternal salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 101)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the twenty-first chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." / This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" / The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and He sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before Him and that followed Him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who "set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51) to accomplish our salvation, dear fellow redeemed:

Donkeys have not enjoyed the most glowing reputation over the years. They are a notoriously stubborn animal, which is why their other name is applied to those who are difficult to get along with. But for all their negative qualities, donkeys have provided a great service to mankind for a long time. They also figure prominently in the Bible.

One of the unique accounts in the Bible describes a donkey speaking to its master. The king of Moab asked a man named Balaam to curse the people of Israel. The LORD told Balaam not to do this, but Balaam was swayed by the promise of earthly riches (2Pe. 2:15-16). He hopped on his donkey to meet the king. On the way, the angel of the LORD stood in front of him with sword drawn. The donkey could see him, but Balaam could not. The donkey stubbornly refused to go forward, which angered Balaam greatly. It happened three times, and Balaam beat the donkey each time.

Then God let the donkey speak, *“What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?”* And Balaam said to the donkey, *‘Because you have made a fool of me. I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you.’* And the donkey said to Balaam, *‘Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Is it my habit to treat you this way?’* And he said, *‘No’*” (Num. 22:28-30). Then Balaam was allowed to see the angel of the LORD and realized his poor donkey had actually saved his life. He continued on to his meeting with the king, and he blessed the people of Israel instead of cursing them.

Donkeys or mules were often the mount for kings before horses became more popular. King David made his successor known by having his son Solomon sit on the royal mule and paraded around as king (1Ki. 1:33-34). The people of Israel may have been thinking of this on Palm Sunday when they shouted *“Hosanna to the Son of David!”* In the same way that Solomon the son of David brought peace and security to Israel, the people hoped Jesus would again make their nation great. They welcomed Jesus as a king, which is exactly what the prophet Zechariah said He was. He wrote, *“Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”*

I

For each load whether noble or not that donkeys had ever carried, no burden was as precious as this One. A donkey carried *the Man*, the One who called Himself *“the Son of Man.”* The donkey felt the weight of this Man on her shoulders, but she could not perceive the weight on *His* shoulders. He carried something too. He carried the weight of the whole world’s sin, the weight of knowing what had to be done to save sinners. Shortly before His Palm Sunday entrance, Jesus told His disciples, *“See, we are going up to Jerusalem. And the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day”* (Mt. 20:18-19).

Jesus knew what was coming, and He still carried on. He did not dig in His heels like a stubborn donkey who figures he has done enough. Jesus was focused on His mission and intended to drink the cup of His Father’s wrath to the bottom. In this respect, I suppose we could call Jesus stubborn. He would not yield no matter how terrible the road ahead looked.

Not all stubbornness is bad. A person can be stubborn about good things just as much as bad things. Stubbornness about sin is always bad. There are many who want to live life their own way, on their terms, and they will not let anyone say otherwise. Not even a passage from Scripture will make them reconsider. If God does not accept them just the way they are, then maybe the problem is with Him.

We tend to be most stubborn when we perceive that we have been wronged by someone. Maybe they were only teasing or joking with us, but we decided to take great offense. Maybe they said or did something hurtful, intentional or not, but our cold-shoulder response is ten times harsher than the initial word or action. We can be so stubborn that we will hold a grudge not just for days, but even for months and years! At that point, what could the offender do to satisfy your stubborn sense of justice?

But there is also a proper stubbornness. It is right to be stubborn about the Bible's teaching. No matter what the world says, the Bible is true as it is written. "[T]he word of our God will stand forever" (Is. 40:8). "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). The world can call you ignorant for believing in a six-day creation and a world-wide flood. It can make fun of you for thinking there is an almighty God and a life after this one. It can call you crazy for living according to the teachings of an old Book. But you have nothing to be ashamed of. You have God and His truth on your side.

And it is right to be stubborn about moral issues. It is right to insist that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit bought by the price of Jesus' blood, and that it is not ours to do with whatever we want (1Cor. 6:19-20). It is right to defend life and the family and the church and the authorities and everything else God commands in His Word. This is stubbornness which God blesses, stubbornness which pleases Him.

II

Sometimes we have been stubborn about good things, but we have just as often (if not more often) been stubborn about bad things. Jesus was stubborn about good things and good things only. He stubbornly refused the devil's temptations, stubbornly loved the people who hated Him, and stubbornly went His way to suffering and death. Nothing could stop Him. His great love for the world compelled Him.

Jesus lived righteously in every instance that you sinned against God by being stubborn about bad things and not stubborn enough about good things. He did not harbor hatred and nurse old grudges. He did not compromise God's plan for mankind established before the foundation of the world. He did not give one inch on God's moral law. Rather He fulfilled the law in every part.

He then blotted out these sins as if you never committed them. He suffered and died for your sinful actions, words, and thoughts, for your donkey-like stubbornness to persist in doing what you knew you shouldn't. This is the reason He rode through the gates of Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday. That coming Friday, He would be nailed to a cross from which He would say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). He was crucified on behalf of the ungodly, the stubborn sinners, including you and me. He was crucified to redeem us from all our sins, from death, and from the power of the devil.

Many centuries ago, a crude picture of Jesus was scratched onto a wall in Rome, in which Jesus was depicted on the cross with the head of a donkey ("Alexamenos graffito"). It was drawn to mock Christians, that they worship a poor excuse for a God in Christ. Christians at that time were likewise referred to as donkeys and treated with contempt. It was a designation they could wear with honor. They stubbornly refused to capitulate to the pagan culture. They stubbornly confessed Jesus as Savior and God even when it led to their torture and violent death. They acknowledged themselves to be lowly creatures unworthy of anything good.

In this they were blessed, and so are you in the same confession. With Jesus, you are sometimes honored in this world, but more often attacked. You are despised and rejected by men and acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3). You take up your cross and follow Jesus to suffering and death. But your story does not end there. Jesus rose again from the dead, and so will you. Jesus is

seated in glory in heaven as you will be. Whatever hardship or pain you feel in this life, however heavy the load you must carry, in heaven you will have rest from your labors (Rev. 14:13). Jesus warmly invites you to have this, *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden,”* He says, *“and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”* (Mt. 11:28-30).

The burden of faith in Jesus is heavy in this world, but it is light as a feather compared to the burden of sin. This, Jesus has removed from you, and He wants to remove it from everyone. He came to Jerusalem for this purpose, to save sinners. **A Donkey Carried the Man Who Carried the World.** He carried the world’s sin. He carried the world’s hope. He carried the plan that would bring life to a world shrouded in death. We therefore carry on in stubborn confidence and hope, knowing what He already carried for us.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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