

3/25/2018

## “What Are You Doing. . .?”

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11; (Zechariah 9:9)

### Lenten Series: Questions Along the Way

#### Palm/Passion Sunday

**Theme: We are often asked by others, and even by Jesus himself, for an account of what we are doing and why? We should be able to respond with assurance in Christ, that we are doing what the Lord has asked of us.**

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For those of you who have been journeying in worship with us over these past weeks, you know we have considered some questions along the way which the gospel of Mark records.

**Today we come to the end of our Lenten journey to Jerusalem.** Once again, we celebrate Palm Sunday, with Jesus’ final entry into Jerusalem, the capital city of Judea. It is often referred to as his “triumphal entry”, as he came riding in upon a donkey, seen by many as the long-awaited fulfillment of the prophet Zechariah’s words, **“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”** (Zechariah 9:9)

We also look forward to the events this Holy Week, which will end with our savior’s passion (or suffering) and death upon a cross. But first, let’s look and listen to how this is portrayed in my favorite biblical movie, *Jesus of Nazareth*. . .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vY90Y-PJib4&t=3132s>

As you can see, this movie, as some others, fails to explain how Jesus acquired the donkey. The bible never states that he owned one, or even used one in all of his previous journeys. Our scripture passage and story for today provides some answers.

And from it, we will consider a question which was asked not by Jesus or one of his disciples. It’s actually a question Jesus instructed his disciples to anticipate. And, it was asked with some variation of meaning.

It is a question which still has meaning and significance for each of us today. So let’s take a look and listen at today’s gospel reading.

#### **Mark 11:1-11 (NIV)**

*As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden.*

The animal referred to as a “colt” here in Mark’s account is that of a “donkey” as recorded by Matthew.

*“Untie it and bring it here”, Jesus says. And “If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’ ”*

Now here is the first mention of today's question, **'Why are you doing this?'** In and of itself, we may just gloss over this question as a matter of fact. Jesus gives a couple of his disciples a task and has anticipated some reasonable questions of their action. He tells them to go and take a young donkey from someone else's possession. We are not given clear insight as to how Jesus knew the colt was there ahead of them in either Bethphage or Bethany. The likelihood is that Jesus knew and perhaps had made previous arrangements with its owner. As we read on we can conclude as much.

Bethphage was within a mile of Jerusalem, the limited distance allowable for a Jew to travel on the Sabbath. And, Bethany was about another mile past that. It was in Bethany that Jesus' friends Lazarus, Martha and Mary lived. While none of the gospels tells who the colt's owner was, those asking responded to the answer Jesus instructed his disciples to give – **"The Lord needs it and will send it back shortly."**

I think it's important for us to note that before all the fanfare and commotion, Jesus asks his disciples to go and bring to him one of the necessary components of his entry into Jerusalem. He deliberately rode in upon a donkey.

As The NIV Application Commentary says:

**Jesus orchestrates a grand entrance into Jerusalem** that departs significantly from his previous patterns of movement in the Gospel of Mark. He has walked everywhere else in his ministry except for the times he crossed the lake in a boat. The decision to complete this last stage of his journey to Jerusalem riding on an animal "looks like some kind of claim to authority." The animal he chooses has never been ridden, which makes it suitable for a sacred purpose and worthy of a king. The colt that is bound and must be untied (11:2, 4) also alludes to Genesis 49:10 – 11 and Zechariah 9:9, passages that were interpreted messianically. Jesus enters Jerusalem as Israel's Messiah. (Garland. "Original Meaning" In *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Mark*. By Garland, 427. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996. )

The question that is asked of those two disciples may also be asked of each of us:

† **Why are you doing this?**

Why are you following Jesus? Why do you do what he asks? Why come to church? Why do you worship God? Why do you read the bible? Why do you help others? Why do you give financial and other support to the church and other ministries?

Can you answer with the words of Jesus – *because "the Lord needs it"*? Can you answer because *"as you have done it to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me."*

Is it from guilt or fear? Is it because of someone else's expectation? Are you expecting some kind of reward? Or, is it out of love, honor, respect and reverence for God and Christ? I'm glad to say that I know for many, hopefully all, it is the latter.

Mark goes on . . .

<sup>4</sup> *They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, <sup>5</sup> some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?"* <sup>6</sup> *They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.*

† **Here we see the other dimension of this question.** As asked by the people who stood and watched as the disciples were untying the colt – “**What are you doing. . .?**”

It’s a question you might expect as a child from a parent or other adult, isn’t it? ☺

**And as disciples of Jesus or not, we may be asked, “What are you doing. . .?”**

We may even find ourselves at times wondering what it is that we are doing – at the moment, or with our lives.

Is what we are doing as individuals (and even as a community of faith) bringing glory and honor to God and Jesus? Is what you are doing following the instructions that Jesus has given? Is what you are doing part of his plan and purpose? These are questions I reflect on every day in one way or another. These are questions for all of us to consider.

I rejoice in the many ways and ministries you respond to Christ’s instruction to go and do what he asks of you . . . whether it’s fostering and nurturing children with love and acceptance, building one another up in faith, serving the poor, comforting the bereaved, or in preparing, leading or assisting in worship or small groups.

I know there are many other ways you can and do serve Jesus in your daily life. Share a witness of them with me and others.

Mark tells us . . .

*When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, “**Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!**”*

The NIV Application Commentary says:

Mark reports that the disciples saddle the animal with their own garments, and the crowd strews the way with their garments (as a crowd did when Jehu was anointed king; 1 Kings 9:12 – 13). Jesus’ followers and those pilgrims caught up in the excitement of the moment also line the streets with leaves and branches (or cut straw) and fill the air with a chorus of “Hosannas” (meaning, “Save us!”) and with beatitudes.

This street choir chants one of the Hallel (thanksgiving) Psalms (Ps. 118:25 – 26). Ironically, Jesus enters the city from the Mount of Olives with the Hallel ringing in his ears. He will later depart for the Mount of Olives to pray in torment after he and his disciples have sung a hymn, possibly a Hallel Psalm, at the close of his Last Supper. (Garland. “Original Meaning” In NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Mark. By Garland, 428. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996.)

**We can look with hindsight upon that Holy Week, from triumphal entry to humiliation, suffering and death upon a cross. We can look with thanksgiving at what Jesus did, and why he did it – to save our souls from sin and death.**

Take some time this week to reflect upon that amazing love and grace, as well as that question asked in today's gospel reading.

We know that sometimes what Jesus asks and expects of us can be difficult or challenging. Maybe he is asking you to do something today, this week.

**Let us remember that when we are asked by others, and even by Jesus himself, for an account of what we are doing and why, we will have an answer. We should each and all be able to respond with assurance in Christ that we are doing what the Lord has asked of us.**

**Amen.**