



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Today is Palm Sunday here at Christ the Servant. In past years I have tried to make it Palm Sunday and the Sunday of the Passion combined. Our church for years encouraged us to do the entire Passion reading on this Sunday because people did not make the practice of coming to church on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. This year I am not doing that. I am going to preach on the Gospels of Luke and Mark that recount the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem by Jesus. I do understand that you cannot have Easter without Good Friday, but there is plenty to talk about in the Palm Sunday readings alone.

Dr Philip W. McLarty tells this story of his youth.

One summer years ago, my brother, Tony, and I drove up to Arkadelphia to get some fluorescent lights for Dad's shop. A law firm had bought this old church building, built its offices within the interior of the sanctuary, and left the existing light fixtures intact. They told Dad he could have them if he'd come take them down.

That's where Tony and I came in. He sent us to Arkadelphia in a pickup truck to get them. Turns out, the ceiling where the light fixtures were hung was a good twenty feet high. We were going to need a tall ladder.

We didn't want to drive all the way back to Hope, so we drove around the streets of Arkadelphia looking for a ladder to borrow. Sure enough, we found an extension ladder propped up beside a chain link fence in the backyard of an older home. It was just what we needed.

We stopped and knocked on the door. A woman came to the door, and we told her what we were up to and asked if we could borrow the ladder. Mind you, we were two college kids who'd shown up out of nowhere. We promised we'd bring it back as soon as we got the light fixtures down. She looked us over and said, "Sure, just be sure and put it back where you found it."

We thanked her and took the ladder. By mid-afternoon, we had a whole truckload of fluorescent light fixtures to take back to Hope. We strapped the ladder on top of the truck and put it back where we found it up against the chain link fence. We knocked at the door and thanked the lady for her kindness and drove home. Nothing to it.

On the way back, the oddity of it all sank in: How amazing – to think that someone would just take us at our word and loan us a ladder out of the blue. We couldn't help but think what her husband might have said if he'd come home early and seen that the ladder was missing: "You did what? Did you get their names? Did they leave a deposit? Woman, what were you thinking? Have you lost your ever-loving mind?"

Does that not sound like our Gospel story this morning? Jesus sent two of his disciples on a mission to bring him a donkey from the village ahead. Simply put, Jesus tells them to bring the donkey to him and if anyone asks why, just tell them that the "Lord needs it". That is a pretty bold mission for the disciples. One could be punished severely for taking a donkey without authorization. It was a crime no different than today looking for a car with the keys in it and just "borrowing it" because you need it.

We actually have no idea if Jesus had prearranged this borrowing or not, but I suspect it was just Jesus exercising his Godley power. How different is that today in our movies where the police shove the car owner out of the way and says that he is commandeering the private vehicle for police business. Jesus used his royal authority to commandeer the animal.

Rather interesting that Jesus needed a donkey. He did not tell his disciples what he needed it for, just that he needed a donkey. Imagine the owners or as the bystanders in Mark's Gospel said, were shocked at such a request. Why

would the Lord need such a simple animal, a donkey? For what purpose could Jesus need such an animal? And the owners agree. Maybe God prepared them for this moment. Yet, there must have been wonder as to what such an insignificant animal could be of use in God's kingdom.

Well, we now know that Jesus used the donkey, a lowly animal to ride into Jerusalem on. He made a grand entrance on the back of this donkey. The lesson for us is that the Lord can take our humble offerings and turn them to gold. He can use our modest gifts in ways that we could never anticipate. How then is our modest being made into something of importance, into faithful service?

That is what I would like us to think about this morning. How can we use our time, talent, gifts, and money to serve the Lord? Or maybe the bigger question is, are you willing to give these gifts to God to use in His way not yours?

Well, in our text today, Jesus has come again to Jerusalem. He had been there many times before; dedicated in the Temple as a baby, at twelve years old he taught in the temple and his parents went home without him, and presumably each year he went with Mary and Joseph to celebrate Passover. However, this time was different. He was not there to celebrate the Passover. He did not bring an unblemished lamb to sacrifice. But rather, he came as the lamb of God to be sacrificed.

This arrival in Jerusalem was the end of a long journey. He had spent the last few years teaching and preaching around the area. But now his time had come. He came into Jerusalem, as the King of Kings, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world. He fulfilled the prophesy of Zechariah in Chapter 9 verse 9. "Lo, your king comes to you; Triumphant and victorious is he, Humble and riding on a donkey, On a colt, the foal of a donkey."

This donkey was a special mount for Jesus. It had never been ridden before and a few cloaks were to soften the ride for Jesus. And seeing their humble king ride into town, the crowd laid their cloaks on the road along with palm branches as what we would call the "Red carpet" today. Shouting "Hosannas" to their Lord. Well, you know where the story goes from here. Jesus had arrived late in the day and when to Bethany for the night. His journey would continue as he made his way to the cross. Just an aside, we never hear of the disciples returning the donkey to its owners. Wonder if they got their animal back?

Jesus is well aware of what lie ahead for him. He is certainly not worried about the donkey as he has much greater work to do, yet the donkey is at the middle of this story. The owners were willing to trust that they animal would be returned to them. Many times, in Scripture people are asked to help Jesus or others. Not always is there a final resolution to their giving.

Think with me a minute of other stories in the Bible where something gets asked of someone. How about the Old Testament story in 1 Kings 17, where the widow in Zarephath was asked by Elijah for a drink and some bread. She and her son were destitute and on the verge of starvation. Yet Elijah asked for food and drink. She fed him and then their oil and meal never ran out until the famine had ended. She fed Elijah first and trusted him and the Lord then provided for her and her son.

Or how about the little boy that gave up his lunch to feed thousands. The disciples offered up what was in his lunch sack and Jesus took it and fed the multitudes.

Or what about the widow's mite? Jesus and his disciples were in the temple when the poor widow comes in and puts her last two pennies in the coffer. She trusted that God would care for her.

This is a theme in Scripture that when you are willing to trust God with what you have, no matter how insignificant it seems, God's blessings will flow through it. Willingness to trust God will bless you more abundantly than you can ever imagine. Put what you have been given by God back in God's hands and God will bless you in return.

And so, that is our lesson here for us this morning. What we have no matter how little or how much, when entrusted to God can produce marvelous things.

Years ago, at St Olaf we had a guest preacher from Outreach for Hope. Can't remember his name but I can still see him standing in front of the organ with his right arm flinging around as he told this story.

There was a young woman walking along the beach picking up starfish stranded on the sand and throwing them back into the water. A man saw what she was doing and said, "Young lady, there are hundreds of starfish all up and down the beach. What good is it going to do to throw a few back into the water?" She picked up a starfish and flung it out as far as she could and said, "it's going to make a difference to that one." His lesson of telling that story was that what we have to offer is important. Whether it is your time,

talent, or money, ever gift counts, great or small. God is not asking each of us to save the world. He is asking for us to be faithful. He is asking each of us to trust Him. God will then use what we give to His glory.

We should not hold back because we think it does not matter. It all matters. Even the check I wrote out last week for Ukraine disaster response fund, matters. Alone, it seems like a pittance when we consider the huge need of the refugees. Together with other people's money it will make a difference to a whole family, or a whole community. So don't ever think that your offerings to God do not matter.

I think another reason people do not trust is that they are fearful of losing what we have. We have a child like attitude that says, "No, it's mine and you cannot have it" as we play with our toys and luxuries. Not having enough is a great fear for a couple reasons. We don't want to be like "those people" who are insecure. We can be selfish and indulge in the false security that all our "Stuff" gives us.

So, what are you going to do when you hear that small voice in your head say, "The Lord needs it"? What are you going to give when God comes to you with that request? Will you trust the Lord just like the owners of that donkey? Or trust just like the lady with the tall ladder? Can you be the lady on the beach flinging starfish back in the ocean?

Our Savior, who rode on the donkey into Jerusalem to his death, gave up everything including his own life, for us. He died a horrible death on the cross for you and for me, giving us the greatest gifts of forgiveness, abundant and eternal life. For that amazing grace that God affords us, we are blessed beyond belief. So trust, trust in His promises and give beyond measure and you will be blessed beyond your wildest dreams. **AMEN**