

"The Lord has need of it"

Sermon for Advent 1 - Nov. 28, 2021

Gospel reading: Luke 19:28-40

When [Jesus] had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it." And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As he was drawing near — already on the way down the Mount of Olives — the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

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What is going on in our story today? The King of Kings is entering his holy city and coming to his holy people.

But not everyone has this understanding of the events. Not even his disciples understand. They may have an inkling, but they don't fully comprehend, as we do, what is happening. But WE have the benefit of hindsight. We know who Jesus is, not simply in part but in whole. I think that we might excuse anyone in this story, who doesn't have the whole picture yet. There are dozens of clues... but even so. If it were not for the Resurrection and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we would most certainly be missing what was actually going on.

But there were things that they didn't miss, as evident by what they do... Spreading their cloaks upon the road, littering the road with palm leaves as a way of preparing the royal highway... rejoicing, praising Jesus as the Christ, Proclaiming "HOSANNA" and "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." Peace and Joy at the arrival of David's Son...All of which was appropriate. And even more so, since even they didn't know to the extent that what they were saying and doing was the right thing to do.

And those that should have known the BEST were behaving as Jesus' WORST opposition...

"Teacher, rebuke your disciples."

He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

He was absolutely NOT going to stop them. This was meet, right and salutary. And it's how we begin our NEW YEAR'S CELEBRATION... by saying loud and proud: the KING, The LORD of ALL has come among us, The Prince of Peace. JOY!

Our HOPE is restored to us. Hope is represented in the blue of Advent on our altar. But long before the season was blue, Advent was celebrated as a mini time of LENT... preparing our hearts and minds in REPENTANCE, for the arrival of the Baby, born in Bethlehem.

I've never been a fan of ADVENT purple, partly because I enjoy all the colors of the season, and there will be time enough for purple in EASTERTIDE. As the sky grows darker and darker with the waning of the sun and the arrival of the winter equinox, I prefer the color blue; it's somehow friendlier.

Never-the-less, THIS time around I'm drawn more strongly to the more mundane part of the gospel story... seemingly less consequential. And it's far more reactive than hope filled:

"If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" And they said, "The Lord has need of it."

I mean... it's stewardship isn't it?

And it sort of intrudes upon us in this lesson as a practical matter. The donkey doesn't actually belong to its "owners"... ultimately the donkey belongs to God. It is in the care of, it's in the stewardship of this family who is in possession of it. I assume this is a family since the pronoun is plural. (THOSE who owned it demanded to know who these people are and what is the meaning of untying THEIR donkey.) You just know that there has to be more to this story, right? But the text skips right over that event giving us only the briefest summary, "Why are you untying the colt?" - "The Lord has need of it." I guess we are left to assume that this answer was sufficient, and they finished borrowing the animal with further incident. Probably. And if that is the case then why draw our attention to it at all?

I think it might serve as a call back to the question of **just who it is that Jesus is**. Yes, certainly King of KINGS and Lord of LORDS. But that means something then... like perhaps, where we stand in relationship to the Creator. *We* are not the permanent ones. We are blessed with some "4 score and 10 years" on this planet if we are favored. Some more, some less, but the Bible calls this the average life span...

For the days of our years are threescore and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

The Psalmist wants us to have this perspective, that the idea of a long life IN THIS WORLD is both a curse and a blessing. For there is much sorrow and hard work for us here.

There is a saying about wanting to live forever... a simple question. But we seek a better world.

*Hebrews 11:13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a **better** country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

The other day as I was watching YouTube, I had two videos in my suggested list. The first was from a guy in Maine who is building an off grid cabin on some land he owns there. He had advice for anyone thinking of doing the same thing. I like watching videos, good videos of people who are building cabins in the woods. Maybe you'd be surprised to discover how many there are. The thing is, this particular person was wanting to let people know how difficult it is in reality. 1.) You are putting yourself out in public, and people are watching you do this, often with the intention of making your life more difficult by pointing out building code violations or other bad practices, including trying to find out where you are located and deliberately reporting your activities to the local officials. 2.) You had better make sure that you are properly permitted, or better yet, buy land that doesn't require you to be subject to any building codes. There is land like that available. But he still wants to warn you that won't stop some people. Especially those who don't believe in the idea of private property.

Now I stopped watching the video after five or so minutes, because it just wasn't up to the standards that I want to watch. But it did start me thinking about the idea of private property and having ownership of things. The older I get the more I wonder about who will get "MY STUFF" when I'm gone? Chris and I have been trying to downsize our household, what to keep and what to get rid of. With our son Aric taking the plunge into home ownership, we have plenty of furniture and whatnot to give him, to start his household. A lot of that stuff we receive from our parents. It's not our style; it won't be his either.

Some of that is hard to part with, because Grampa made that, or my mother gave that to us for our wedding ... practical reasons, sentimental reasons to keep STUFF we don't really want or use. It's ours now... but it won't always be.

I remember a couch we bought at a garage sale... we thought it was a Herman Miller couch, Mid-Century Modern. A low long couch that they call a gondola. It needed reupholstering. At some point in all of our moving, we let go of it. Since then we often kind of wish we had it back, because it was comfortable to lay down on. I was thinking about it the other day and started to search for it online. I searched Herman Miller furniture... but nothing even close came up. It was pretty unusual, so I searched for Mid

Century. Finally I saw a picture of one. It was called a gondola sofa, by Adrian Pearsall. (Now I'm looking to see if that name gets a reaction. No? I didn't think so.) But I searched for Adrian Pearsall and discovered that our couch we let go all those years ago, even in the condition it was in... was worth more than \$4,000 -- in fact, a lot closer to \$6,000.

Turns out Adrian Pearsall is a "thing."

All that to tell you that **we really don't own anything**. We come into the world naked and we leave it naked. Remember Abraham lamenting to God that he had no son of his own to inherit his possessions, his lands, his estate... It would go to his servants, out of his family.

The land my house sits on... who owned it before me? Before them? It was ALWAYS God. And will always BE God's. We are but stewards.

BUT we are stewards with rights... When a land or possessions were given into the care of the steward, it was THEIR responsibility to take care of the land or possessions... They had custody. Legal, if temporary, OWNERSHIP.

There was often trouble when the STEWARDS forgot who was the person who had claim to the object of the stewardship. The Law tends to favor the steward in most cases. The phrase that possession is 9/10th of the law isn't literally true but the force of law favors the steward. Except in the case where the true owner returns to lay claim.

I caught the last few minutes of the movie "Bonnie and Clyde" with Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty. Bonnie and Clyde are set up in the end, and they meet their fate on a country road, where six Texas Rangers, armed with automatic weapons, shotguns and pistols, acting outside of their jurisdiction, ambushed and shot down in cold blood the unarmed couple just outside of Bienville, Louisiana. Drilling their stolen 1934 Ford Deluxe V8 with 112 bullet holes. Of course as a result the vehicle was now as iconic as it was infamous, and there is a lot of money to be made in the ownership of that vehicle. Not only the vehicle but the weapons and clothing and other items. Ruth Warren of Topeka Kansas, was the original owner of the V8, and had the title to prove it. It was her stolen property. It was in the possession of the Texas Rangers. The rangers were cheated out of more than a quarter of a million dollars of reward money, when those who posted the rewards reneged on their pledges. In the end, each officer was only able to claim \$200.11. Losing out on the memorabilia was a hard pill for them, and in the end Mrs. Warren had to sue for the return of the vehicle.

What is it that we think we really own? It all comes to us from God. There are certainly opportunities that we work for. And we receive the reward of that hard work... as the Psalmist said... Hard labor for the years of our life. But it is still God who gives the blessing of what we steward.

I wonder if we began to think in terms of our stewardship of these things that are placed in our possession, our care, our responsibility, if we wouldn't do a better job with them. Especially the land. And perhaps, on an even greater scale... the *people* we are responsible to serve and protect.

Yes... the KING of KING has come to us... the Prince of Peace. In him there is forgiveness, and judgement, therefore he is to be respected and feared. And we are his stewards... even the humble owners of donkeys... when we are called upon to render our service to the King.