

How About a Little Donkey Riding?
Matthew 21:1-11 March 16, 2008

Did you see any of them the last couple of weekends? Did you hear any of them? Who, you ask? - All those high school basketball fans in town to cheer their teams on. They came from all over the state. They filled the Schott with their colors and their noise. They're all home or on their way home now and in four communities around the state last weekend they welcomed home their girls' state championship teams. And in four communities this weekend they are welcoming home their boys' state championship teams. It's March and madness has taken over the homes of those of us who love our basketball.

Most of the communities will have a parade to welcome home their new heroes – to celebrate their season. And in most cases they will be escorted into town – through the streets of their town – by police cars and fire trucks while they ride in the comfort of a school or chartered bus.

But, you know something I'm pretty sure of? Not one of them will make their grand entrance on donkeys. They just aren't the mode of transportation of choice when it comes to making an honorable entrance.

While there's no question there was a lot of excitement around Jerusalem when they heard Jesus was coming and when they first greeted and welcomed him into the community - while there's no question their enthusiasm was at a fever pitch - when they saw him on that donkey – well, there had to have been some head turning – perhaps some rushing to get away from the obviously misled crowd that was going to be easily crushed by the Roman army when they decided they had enough of this inappropriately armed but perceived threat. Seeing Jesus on a donkey had to have caused some to wonder about his being the one who was to come and lead them into a military overthrow of the Roman government.

There's no question that what the writer of the Gospel of Matthew was trying to do with his way of telling the story was to make sure that no one misunderstands that there was a tremendous difference between what the crowd thought was happening and what God's intent was – what Jesus understood his ministry to be – what this new kingdom was to be. There was no way this ride upon a simple, humble beast of burden was the royal processional expected by those who lined the streets of Jerusalem that day and shouted *hosanna*.

Donkeys are work horses. They are common pack animals used to do the dirty, the heavy, stuff. They are not a symbol of power or royalty or importance.¹

Jesus rode into Jerusalem so that all would know he was the one to whom all knees should bow – that he was King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But, he did it on a donkey so that all would also understand that his messiahship, his kingdom, was very different than that commonly held in that day. He was a donkey sort of guy - a work horse kind of guy - a servant of servants.

So, are you interested in doing a little donkey riding? That's really what the call on our lives involves. Imagine for a moment that the Palm Sunday parade is traveling down High Street – right out in front of our building and we're out on the sidewalk waiting and watching. The crowds on both sides of the street are cheering him on – he's traveling south on High heading downtown – to where the political power is – but he's on this donkey. Will anyone really take him serious? Can he really move the powers that be in government – in the church – to do things differently – to act out of a different set of priorities?

Suddenly, as we stand there and offer our voices to those of the rest of the crowd we sense Jesus inviting us to do more than stand on the side of the road and watch his donkey riding motorcade. Suddenly we sense that he is inviting us to join his trek – his parade – his march. And what we sense is, if we do – if we step into that street – that we are throwing our whole future behind the truth that he is the Son of God – our, mine, your Savior – King of our lives – Lord of each one of us. And, our instincts reveal to us that when we say yest to that relationship – yes to serving him – we will know a quality of life both in this world and the hereafter that only serving him can provide. Our instincts also make us aware that there’s going to be a cost to following him. It involves being a humble subject of his and that means he’s going to change our values, our vocations, our habits, our budgets, our friends.²

We know that it is for sure safer to continue standing on the sidewalk – with the crowd – a bit amused by how foolish he looks – but offering our words of encouragement just in case he really can do something about world hunger, about poverty, about greed, about militarism, about power mongering, about elitism. Following Jesus – accepting him – allowing him to be Lord of our lives – means accepting a donkey riding style of living – a donkey style of decision-making – a donkey style of, well, serving.

So, are you interested in doing a little donkey riding? Actually, it probably won’t be a little but a lot.

I want to encourage you to make an effort to attend the services of Holy Week this week. I honestly feel that Easter Sunday – the resurrection – only is relevant when we know and make a part of our lives the story leading up to it – when we remember and experience that last meal in the upper room and what it means for our lives – when we remember and experience the event of Friday and what it means for our lives. Resurrection takes on such a much deeper, more real meaning when we take into our minds and hearts – when we make a part of our lives the meaning of the cross.

What the Maple Grove Players do for us today is they set the stage – they put us in touch with the Holy Week experience – with the events of Holy Week – they prepare us for making the decision of whether we’re going to ride donkeys for and with Jesus from now on.

And so, let us now prepare for their sharing with us the Passion story. I invite you to stand as you are able and turn with me to page # 269 as we sing together *Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days* in preparation of their sharing.

1. Leonard Sweet, “Are you Willing to Be a Donkey?,” Collected Sermons, (ChristianGlobe Networks, 2007), 0-000-1415.
2. Dr. Bill Bouknight, “An Unidentified King,” Collected Sermons (ChristianGlobe Networks, Inc., 2002), 0-000-0000-12.