

April 9, 2017 - PALM SUNDAY
BUCYRUS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

“JESUS CHANGES EVERYTHING: A DONKEY? REALLY?”

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Scripture: John 12:12-19

There is nothing dignified about a donkey. We can look at a donkey from any angle and we will fail to find what we might call a sense of ‘presence’. A donkey just doesn’t have it. A donkey is an awkward, stubborn, and well... not very intelligent animal to say the least.

In his well-known poem on the donkey, G.K. Chesterton makes the donkey reply to those of us who might make fun or laugh at him:

“Fools! For I also had my hour; One far fierce hour and sweet: There was a shout about my ears, And palms before my feet.”

Whatever Jesus Christ touches Jesus dignifies! Whatever Jesus touches Jesus makes whole!

As Bill Gaither wrote in his hymn,

“He touched me, O, he touched me, And O the joy that floods my soul!
Something happened, and now I know, He touched me and made me whole.”

It was God’s plan that the Messiah ride into Jerusalem, not on a valiant steed, but on an undignified donkey! Everything Jesus did just cried out: “Humility.” But then Jesus is God. And therefore what did Jesus have to prove?

It’s the people who feel they have to prove something...those who are insecure in themselves and crave the respect of others in order to feel as if their life matters...it’s those of us who demand the accolades, who come driving in with the fanciest or loudest of cars, whose personalities dominate and subordinate, whose houses take up what is practically the equivalent of an entire city block who need to learn what true greatness is.

As the figure playing the part of Christ in Jesus Christ Superstar sings so poignantly:

“Neither you Simon, nor the 50,000. Nor Judas nor the Jews,
nor the priests nor the scribes, nor poor Jerusalem itself,
understand what power is, understand what glory is,
understand at all, understand at all.
To conquer death you only have to die, You only have to die.”

And is that not what Christ did? And is that not the key to our living life to the fullest? We only have to die to the delusions of riches, selfishness, war, the “my way or the highway” type of thinking...to be great we only have to die...and live for Christ!!! This is what it takes to be truly great!

The truly great are able to be comfortable in their own skin, love themselves despite whatever shortcomings they may have to endure and are free to love God and neighbor as themselves!!!

So Jesus, being TRULY GREAT in Capital letters...came riding into Jerusalem on a ridiculous looking donkey!!! But you know what? That donkey did a pretty good job on that first Palm Sunday, did it not? That undignified donkey didn't let Jesus down in the least. Far from dragging the pomp and circumstance down to its level...the donkey was actually lifted up. The undignified became dignified because it was being used by Christ; because it was serving Christ!!!

My friends, do you need a lift? Do you need to feel as if your life truly has meaning? The only answer that will satisfy is to be willing to be used by the Lord; to serve Jesus!!! And in doing so, your life will become filled with more worth and dignity and meaning than you could ever imagine!

The more you serve Christ the better life becomes, and the less your insecurities rule and cause you to have the need for that fancy car, that big bank account, that ridiculously humongous and wasteful house!!!

And if Christ had a grand purpose for a lowly donkey just think of the grand purpose Christ has in mind for you!!! You only have to be willing to be used! No matter how ordinary, uneducated, unpopular, disabled, disfigured, untalented, or seemingly unimportant a person may be or feel—Jesus Christ has a use for them, and He raises that person up—or gives them dignity--by His use!

Think about it. Jesus Christ uses ordinary people in order to accomplish extraordinary things. Look at the disciples themselves. They were all ordinary people. As far as we know, none of them were of noble birth. None of them were what we might call a genius, or a scholar. We know the occupations of only five out of the twelve. Four were fishermen and one was a tax collector—and a tax collector in those days was a greedy money lender—not a respected government official. And with this group of ordinary men, Jesus Christ turned the world upside down! And Jesus has been using ordinary people ever since and doing mighty things with them.

God will raise up anybody who will give Him their heart. And we are all called to give Christ our hearts, our lives, our all—no matter who we are, no matter where we come from. Christ has a divine purpose for all of our lives. All of us were created with certain talents and abilities that are to be used by God to live abundant fulfilling lives of dignity and worth for the sake of God and others! In the eyes of God there is no such thing as human garbage. There is no such thing as an unimportant person. People are not disposable. No matter how the world might view us—no matter how we might view ourselves...God views us with eyes that see us as the most precious and valuable treasures in this entire universe. With this in mind—there is nothing that God cannot accomplish through any one of our lives!

What is God accomplishing through you? What is God's plan for your life? The worst thing any one of us can do is to shrink away from His call on our lives—using our inferiorities as a wall between us and what God knows we can be! Never allow yourself to answer God by saying: “I'm not clever, I'm not good enough, or talented. I can't do anything.”

Because the Christ Who made use of a undignified animal such as a donkey can and will make much greater use of you or me, and if He doesn't the only reason will be that we won't let Him! How many folks waste entire lives due to feelings of inferiority, and thinking they are unusable?

And the outcome is that not only does that individual miss out, but everyone else misses out as well. Who could that person have touched and made whole in the name of the Lord? Who could that person have helped? There is nothing more selfish than to be so self-consumed...that one is unwilling to be used by God!

If you do not feel worthy or dignified enough to serve the Lord just remember the donkey and know that God the Lord needs you for God is saying to you and to me: “We'll do something together. We'll make something beautiful out of your life!”

Do you know that you have a God who believes in you? God believes in you so much that God came and died, so that you can live! That's a big investment.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ has purchased those who believe in Him by His blood...by the blood He shed on the Cross. Have you allowed yourself to be purchased by God? Have you allowed God to purchase you with the most precious thing possible?—that is, the shed blood of His One and Only Son! We don't come cheaply. God didn't buy us in a discount store. So, let's not act as if we are cheap and unwanted. What an insult that is to the One Who went so far and spent so much!

On November 2nd, 1739 a man with an enormous and grotesque squint appeared on the scene in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. People would laugh at him before he got up to speak. He did not look the part of an eloquent preacher. He was not blessed with good looks. Instead his eyes were horribly crossed. But no one questioned God's use of him once He began to speak! He didn't let his disabilities get in the way of God's great plan for his life. He allowed God to have him—crossed eyes and all. And more than any other single person in America during his time—God used George Whitefield, a plain old Methodist preacher, to cause the Great Awakening to burst forth on American soil. No one but God knows how many souls have been saved as a result of George Whitefield's preaching.

Don't let the laughter of the world stop you from becoming one of God's beautiful shining lights! Don't let anyone make you feel unfit to answer God's call. Never forget that it was the

one-talented man in the parable of the talents who was rebuked in that parable. Why? Because he didn't allow God to use what God have given Him. If you are one-talented or half-talented never let yourself go with the excuse: "What can I do? I have so little!"

Jesus Christ has done mighty things with one-talented men and women. Most people who knew Philip Bliss put him in the one-talent category. He was no poet. He had a single gift of being able to put verses together in a metrical structure. But what use Jesus Christ made of his gift! All around the English speaking world people sang his Gospel songs—and some people still do.

And who was the farmer who clambered up a pyramid of people in order to lift John Wesley as a little boy of six years old from the blazing rectory at Epworth on February 9, 1709? Did he play a part in changing the spiritual history of the world? I think he did. But nobody knows his name—except for the One Who used him for His purposes—the Only One Who really counts—Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world!!!

To what group do you belong? Are you ordinary? Uneducated? Disfigured? One-talented? Unknown? Well, the Christ Who lifted up and made royal use on Palm Sunday of an mere donkey can make much higher use of you or me. Donkeys are stubborn, stupid and undignified. I've been all three of these things as well---and often. How about you?

We can learn a lot on this Palm Sunday from God's use of that donkey.