

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: How Lowly and How Humble

Lesson: Luke 19:28-40 NRSV

²⁸ After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

²⁹ When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" ³² So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ They said, "The Lord needs it." ³⁵ Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸ saying,

*"Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!"*

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

Today is Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. And Holy Week starts today. Luke 19:28-40 describes Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. Jesus rode on a colt, which means a young male donkey which is less than four years of age, when he entered Jerusalem. We may have a question like "Why did Jesus ride the baby donkey?" Thus, today we are going to see the text focusing on why

Jesus rode on the donkey when he entered Jerusalem and what it means for Jesus to enter Jerusalem in his life.

Verse 28 says that “After he (Jesus) had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.” For Jesus, entering Jerusalem is his journey to passion, suffering, being despised, and death. People waved palm branches to welcome Jesus as a king saying “Hosanna,” but he entered Jerusalem to die and resurrect for the redemption of humanity. Thus, the meaning of that Jesus went on ahead is to instruct us to walk the same way Jesus walked.

In the next verse, Jesus came near to Bethphage and Bethany on the mountain called the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives is also well known as the place where Jesus ascended to heaven after his resurrection. Thus, when the Mount of Olives is described in the Bible, it recalls to us the promise of Jesus’ second coming. As it is written, Jesus came close to two villages on the Mount of Olives: Bethphage and Bethany. The name of Bethany means “House of the Poor” because the poor lived in Bethany. The name of Bethphage means “House of unripe figs.” It might be out of the blue, but I’m a fig person. Fig trees bear fruits twice a year, and the harvest times are known as early July and late August to late October. By the way, the most figs of the first harvest in July are unripe. It is hard to eat the fruits because they are unripe and bitter. In other words, the figs of the first harvest don’t have commercial value because nobody wants to buy them. However, there were some who ate the bitter, unripe fruits. They were the poor because they were always hungry and had to survive from poverty. Thus, Bethany and Bethphage were the villages of the poor.

Jesus passed Bethphage and Bethany while he was going to Jerusalem. By the way, the villages had very similar images with the people Jesus associated with. What kind of people did Jesus mainly spend time with? Jesus was always with the poor, the sick, the sinners, the tax collectors, and the prostitutes in his life. When he had come near the villages, he sent two of the disciples, saying: “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here.” (30)

Jesus knew everything that there was a baby donkey tied up that had never been ridden in Bethphage, and if the owner of the donkey was in the village and if he asked something, the disciples could bring it to Jesus after answering that “The Lord needs it.” By the way, when the disciples heard what Jesus was saying, they might have been unsure about Jesus’ instruction. And, they might have worried what to do if the donkey wasn’t there and what to do if the owner of the donkey wouldn’t give them his donkey. However, when the disciples went to the village, surprisingly they found it. And, they said to the owners that “the Lord needs it,” and they were able to bring it to Jesus.

Now, let’s read verse 35 together: “Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.” As Jesus entered Jerusalem, his disciples and people kept spreading their clothes on the road. It was prophesied in the book of Zechariah that a king would come riding on a donkey. Let’s read Zechariah 9:9 together: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! 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.” In NRSV, the Bible says that the king rode a donkey because he was humble. And, let’s see another version. In NIV, it says that “Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, *lowly* and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The big difference between the two versions is that NRSV describes the king as humble, and NIV describes the king as lowly. Humble is sometimes used as a positive word like humility. However, the meaning of lowly is not as positive such as poor, low, low-born, low-ranking, inferior. Lowly is semantically closer to the original text than humble.

Let's imagine together. Jesus is entering Jerusalem and people are waving palm branches, and keep spreading their cloaks on the ground. By the way, he rode an ugly, short-legged baby donkey. When we imagine the arrival of a king, we expect a king riding a wonderful white horse or an elegant black horse on the red carpet. However, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was very

different from people's expectations and ours. His entry on the small donkey was very comical and funny and lowly.

We have questions. Why did Jesus come riding on a baby donkey? Of course we know that Jesus' riding on a baby donkey was recorded in Zechariah's prophecy, but why does the Bible say that the king will come to the earth on a donkey? From this question, we can find God's deep intention. Biblically, the kingdom of God begins in humble, poor, and lowly places. People believed that the king should be in the capital city and should be in the center, but the work of God and the kingdom of God began with the poor in the humble, and the lowly places. Think about Jesus' birth. People expected and thought that a new king would be born in Jerusalem, but he was born in a manger in Bethlehem. And, in Jesus' life, he was a friend of the sinners, the poor, the sick, and the tax collectors unlike the Pharisees and scribes. People expected Jesus to be the political Messiah who would deliver them from Roman oppression, so they wanted Jesus to rule everything in the world politically. However, contrary to their expectation, Jesus was naked, whipped, ridiculed by people, crucified, and pierced by a spear on the cross.

However, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God changed the cross that was used to execute the rebels into a symbol of love, salvation, and grace. Nobody remembers the name of king Herod, the names of the Pharisees, but we remember and believe that the name of Jesus Christ as our king, our savior, and our Messiah that saved us.

In the time of Jesus, nobody realized that Jesus was the Messiah except Mary, who anointed Jesus, because they were all paying attention to the central, high position. However, God's will was beyond our thoughts. Therefore, we must try to have a spiritual sensor that can sense God's will. In every moment, we must be able to discern what God's will is, what we must do on this earth as Christians, and which way is the path to following Jesus Christ. That is truly what He wants for us. Don't look at the center where people pay attention, but look at the insignificant, unattractive, marginalized, and lowly because from there the kingdom of God and the work of God for salvation begins. Amen.