

.PALM SUNDAY

“The Lord Needs It”

Luke 19:28-40

It was a scene so inspiring that it brought tears into the hearts and eyes of rugged, calloused, battle-scarred sailors.

They were in the midst of war. They had witnessed all of the sights and sounds of combat. They were well-acquainted with death and fear and bloodshed *but they had never seen anything like this*. It would be forever etched in their minds.

Four chaplains were standing on the deck of their ship, hand-in-hand, singing that old hymn *“Nearer, My God To Thee.”*

George Fox was the oldest of the chaplains. He was a veteran of World War I and a recipient of the Silver Star for bravery. He had become a public accountant after the war and then a minister. But when World War II broke out he told his wife, *“I have to go. I know from experience what our boys are about to face. They need me.”* And, so, he went.

One of the chaplains was a Jewish rabbi—a man by the name of **Alexander Goode**. He was a family man, the father of four children, a medical doctor, but he was patriotic to the core. His nation was at war. How could he possibly stay and enjoy the comforts of home while others were going and laying their lives on the line to insure that there would still be a land for the free and a home for the brave? And, so, he too enlisted and went to serve his country.

Johnny Washington was the third chaplain. He came from a poor Irish family who had immigrated to America. He grew up in the slums of Newark, New Jersey, but went on to become a Roman Catholic priest. He was known for his laughter and his love of music.

The fourth chaplain, the youngest of the four, was a man by the name of **Clark Poling**. He was a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church.

He was the seventh generation of an unbroken line of ministers. His

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father was a minister and his grandfather was a minister and his great-grandfather was a minister and his great-great-grandfather was a minister...on and on back seven generations. But he didn't want to be a chaplain. He wanted to be a fighting soldier. He didn't want people to think that he was “hiding behind the church.” But when he found out that the mortality rate for chaplains was the highest of all those who served in the armed forces then he enlisted as a chaplain.

It was a stirring sight to see these four chaplains, hand-in-hand, on the deck of that ship signing, *“Nearer My God To Thee.”* But they weren't conducting a worship service for the fighting men, as you might think—**they were preparing to die!**

It was the early morning hours of **February 3rd, 1943**. The ship they were on was named the *Dorchester* and was bound for Greenland with 906 men aboard when suddenly a torpedo from a Nazi U-boat ripped through the hull of the *Dorchester* and the gigantic ship began to sink in the icy waters of the North Atlantic.

Fear gave way to panic among the sailors and soldiers. Most of them rushed to the deck, completely forgetting their life jackets, leaving them below. The chaplains did their best to try to ease the panic and help these terrified men escape the sinking ship. When the lifeboats were all full, each of the chaplains gave their own life jackets to panic-struck men who had none.

The *Dorchester* sank completely in the short span of 27 minutes. As the men who had escaped looked back at their doomed ship they saw four chaplains standing on board the sinking ship, hand-in-hand, lifting their voices to God, singing *“Nearer, My God To Thee.”*

It was a sight and a sound they would never ever forget. Jesus said one time, *“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends”* (John 15:13 NIV). Today we are celebrating and commemorating **Palm Sunday** and I'm reminded that as Jesus traveled down the road to Jerusalem He was doing precisely that—*laying down his life for His friends*.

Jesus was on a mission. He knew what awaited Him in Jerusalem. He

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told His disciples, ***“We are going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three day later he will rise”*** (Mark 10:33-34 NIV).

We often refer to this as *“The Triumphal Entry.”* In fact, if you look in your Bibles you will notice that is how it is listed and entitled in all four gospels – *“The Triumphal Entry.”* But, believe me, that’s an oxymoron if there ever was one!

Jesus wasn’t heading into Jerusalem to be glorified and exalted and honored. He was heading into Jerusalem to die—to be jeered and mocked and crucified. He was heading into Jerusalem to lay down His life for His friends.

Our Latin forefathers used to refer to this journey to Jerusalem, this journey to the Cross, as the **Via Dolorosa**, which means *“the way of grief”* or *“the way of suffering.”* That doesn’t sound very triumphant, does it? But Jesus was on a mission...and nothing, absolutely nothing, was going to stop Him.

The Bible puts it like this in **Luke 9:51**, ***“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem”*** (NIV). He was going there to die—to lay down His life as a sacrifice for others.

I want to read Luke’s account of what happened that very first Palm Sunday. You find the story in the **19th chapter** of **Luke** beginning with the **28th verse**.

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told

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them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.”

“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”
(Luke 19:40 NIV)

Now what I want you to really notice this morning is the story within the story. There are all kinds of people near the entrance to Jerusalem on this particular day lining the streets and waving their palm branches. They are cheering Jesus and waving their palms and shouting His name for a variety reasons.

Some are **political activists**. They have heard that Jesus has supernatural power and they want Him to use that power to free Israel from Roman rule.

Others have loved ones who are **sick** and **dying**. They have heard about all of the miracles Jesus has performed. They wave their palm branches hoping for physical healing.

Some are **genuine followers** of Jesus. They have heard Him talk about the Kingdom of heaven. They have heard Him preach and proclaim, ***“The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”*** (Mark 1:15 NIV). They wave their palm branches thinking, ***“Finally! This is it! This is what we’ve been waiting for. He is going to establish Himself as an earthly king.”***

And still others are just **curious onlookers**. They don't really have a clue as to what this is all about. They just want to be where the action is. They just want to be a part of something big. And so they pick up a branch and wave it like everyone else is doing. They get caught up in the exhilaration of the moment but have no real understanding as to why they do what they do.

Jesus was the only one in this parade who really knew and understood why He was going to Jerusalem—to die. He had a **mission** while everyone else had an **agenda**.

But here's the story within the story. **Jesus was successful in accomplishing His mission, at least in part, because of the readiness and the willingness of some unknown man or woman to simply give what they had to Jesus.** I'm talking about that guy (or that gal) who owned the donkey. *Have you ever noticed this individual when you read this story?*

This person is so far in the background that it would be easy to just skip over them when you look at this story...and usually we do! He or she gets lost in the shadows. But this morning I want you to focus upon this story within the story.

Notice four things – the **person**, the **gift**, the **response**, and the **blessing**.

The Person *Who was this individual who helped Jesus to accomplish His mission? Who was it that owned this donkey? We don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. We aren't given a name.*

Four different individuals recorded this story—**Matthew, Mark, Luke** and **John**—and yet not one of them identifies who the owner is. It's almost like the Holy Spirit is saying to us—and, remember, *“holy men of God spoke (and wrote!) as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2nd Peter 1:21 NKJV)—**“Hey! It really doesn't matter who the owner was. It could have been someone great and powerful it could have been someone small and insignificant.”**

“It could have been someone well-known and highly visible in the Bible or it could have been someone who nobody would have known—somebody completely unknown and anonymous. It could have been someone rich who owned lots of donkeys and oxen and cattle or could have been someone poor who owned just the one donkey and little else.”

It's like the Holy Spirit is saying, **“It doesn't matter who the individual was. It could have been anyone. What counts is what they did and the spirit in which they did it. This could be and should be every man's story.”**

What was this person's connection with Jesus? Again, we have to answer that we just don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. Some Bible scholars have suggested that the owners of this donkey must have been Jesus' close friends **Mary, Martha** and **Lazarus**. They surmise that since this occurred near Bethany—which is where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived—that it only makes sense that Jesus would make such a presumptuous request like this—just tell them, **“The Lord needs it,”**—of His closest friends.

Who knows? It could have been friends or neighbors of Mary, Martha and Lazarus whom Jesus had come to know during one of His frequent visits there. It could have been someone for whom Jesus had provided a great favor—perhaps the parents of a child whom Jesus had healed or the family of a blind man who Jesus had touched and restored sight or a man who had once suffered the humiliation and stigma of leprosy but whom Jesus had made whole.

Maybe it was a family member of one of the disciples. We don't know who this person who was helped Jesus accomplish His mission—whether it was a name everyone would know or a name no one would know. We don't know what their connection was with Jesus—whether they were very close to Him, deeply devoted to Him, a passionate follower or just a friend of a friend.

All we know is that this person owned a donkey, Jesus needed it, and they freely gave it.

Now turn your eyes for a moment from the **Person** to the **Gift**.

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The Gift As gifts go, it really wasn't all that impressive of a gift, was it? A donkey! The Lord needed a donkey to help get Him into Jerusalem to fulfill His mission and this nameless, unidentified, unknown person simply let Jesus use His donkey.

I'm sure no one "oohed" or "ahhed" at the magnificence of this gift. I'm sure no one thought, "*We ought to give this guy a plaque or something. This is impressive! This is big! Wow, what a sacrifice! What a great humanitarian he is.*"

In terms of dollars and cents, this gift was miniscule. Nothing really great or grand about it! But here we are nearly two thousand years later and we're still talking about it. We're still remembering it. We're still honoring what this unidentified, unknown, nameless person did.

Jesus needed a donkey to help get Him into Jerusalem to fulfill his mission. He sent this message to this person, "*The Lord needs it.*" And with an open heart and a willing spirit this person said, "*Here, Lord. You need it? It's yours.*"

You see, it wasn't the size of the gift that was impressive—it was the willingness of the heart. "*Whatever I have, Lord, if You need it, it's Yours.*" Think of what Jesus did with that little boy's lunch two fish and five barley loaves. He gave it to Jesus to use and our Lord fed a whole multitude of hungry people.

Think of those two little copper coins that widow put into the offering in the temple one day while Jesus was there. It wasn't much. Others were giving far more. But it was all she had and, lovingly, she wanted to give it to Jesus. He was so moved that He gathered His disciples and said, "*I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on*" (Luke 21:3-4 NIV). We don't know her name but we remember her gift.

Think about Moses out in the middle of the wilderness with nothing

in his hands but an old walking stick, a staff, a rod, a rough-hewn

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piece of wood. The Lord said to him, "*What is that in your hand?*" (Exodus 4:2 NIV)).

"Nothing, Lord! I don't have anything in my hands. Oh, You mean this ole piece of wood, this staff?"

"Yes, Moses, your staff! Will you let me use it? Will you consecrate it to Me and to My use in ministry?"

"Sure, Lord, it's just a stick." But do you remember how God used that old piece of wood? As the Israelites are fleeing from slavery in Egypt and they come to the Red Sea it looks like the party is over, they have come to the end of the line, there is no way they can escape. The Red Sea is in front of them, the mountains are around them, and Pharaoh and his army are nipping at their heels, ready to massacre them.

But God says, "*Moses, raise your staff. Lift up that old piece of wood.*" And the Red Sea separates and the people of Israel are given a pathway to safety.

Another time, out in the middle of the desert, there is no water to drink. People are dehydrating and weak and soon they will drop like flies. But God says, "*Moses, take your staff and strike that rock.*" So Moses does and suddenly water, cool water—refreshing, reviving water—flows from the rock.

You see, it isn't the size of the gift—it's the willingness of the heart. Will we let God use what we have in our hands? I want you to just burn these words from the story within the story—"*The Lord needs it*"—on the hard drive of your memory this morning.

What do you suppose you have that the Lord needs? I mean everybody has a donkey of some sort. *What do you have that can really help Jesus accomplish His mission here on earth?* Maybe you can sing. Maybe you have a home that you can open up for a Bible study. Maybe you have some time to give to a food pantry. Maybe you have a hug that you can share with some lonely person in a nursing home.

It probably isn't something big—just a donkey. But the Lord needs it.

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And He has a wonderful way of doing so much with so little!

I have asked you to look at the **Person** and the **Gift**. Now look at the **Response**.

The Response *Did you notice how this person responded?* Jesus' two disciples begin to untie the donkey. The owner says, "**Why are you untying the colt?**" The disciples answer, "**The Lord needs it.**"

"Oh, all right! Fine! Take it." Just like that. It wasn't, "**Now let me see your credentials,**" or "**Why does the Lord need it?**" or "**How do I know the Lord sent you?**" or "**What am I going to get out of this?**"

It was just, "**The Lord needs it? That's good enough for me. Take it. Use it. If there's something I have that the Lord needs then He can have it.**"

Let's just be utterly honest with each other this morning. In most of our service to the Lord we are the ones who pull most of the strings. We are the ones who are really in control. We choose whom and when and where and how we will serve.

We're the ones in charge. But, you see, Jesus is really looking for something else. He is calling us to be servants. And when we choose to really be His servants, we give up the right to be in charge. We become willing to be available and vulnerable and open.

Fred Craddock, in one of his books, tells about a time when he was living and ministering in Oklahoma how a woman came to see him one day and asked him to step out of his office and follow her to a car in the parking lot. In the back seat of this car was her younger brother.

He was 18 years old and had been severely injured in a horrible automobile accident. He was in a coma. She had carefully carried

him to her car and laid him in the back seat. She had quit her job to care for him and now all of her resources were gone and she asked Pastor Craddock to heal him this brother of hers.

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Here he was lying helpless in the backseat of her car. Dr. Craddock explained to her that he could pray for them but he couldn't heal him.

After he had finished with his prayer this woman got back into the car behind the wheel and as she drove away, Dr. Craddock heard her mutter to herself, "**Then what in the world do you do?**"

You know, after 35 years in the pastoral ministry, I have wanted to ask some of the people who I have served that very same question. We have become so adept at trying to "*discover our spiritual gifts*" (and I recognize the need for that, please don't misunderstand me) that we find it easy to make some pretty flimsy excuses when it comes to service and say, "**Well that's not my gift.**"

We need someone to help out in the nursery. "**Well, pastor, I would love to help out but I just don't do babies. That's not my gift.**"

We need someone to help with the junior high boys and girls. "**Well, pastor, I would love to help out but I just don't do junior highs. That's not my gift.**"

We need someone to help our shut ins. "**Well, pastor, I would love to help out but I just don't do nursing homes. That's not my gift.**"

We need someone to help out with some little tasks around the church. "**Well, pastor, I would love to help out but I just don't do windows nor trim shrubs. That's not my gift.**"

At times I just want to ask, "**Well then what in the world do you do?**" Have I quit preaching and gone to meddling? *But you get my point, don't you?* This guy with the donkey offered not excuses, no rationalizations, no conditions. "**The Lord needs it.**" *Oh, really? Fine! Here it is Lord.*

Do you remember what the Bible says about the angels and what they

did for the Lord in the opening chapter of **Mark**? It says, “***And angels served him***” (Mark 1: 13 Young’s Literal Translation). And it is said of Jesus, “***The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve***” (Matthew 20:28 NIV).

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On the last day of His earthly life, He said, “***I am among you as one who serves***” (Luke 22:27 NIV).

Serving Jesus is not always comfortable. But serving is what the angels do; it is what Jesus Himself does; and it is what all the disciples of Jesus should do. It’s what this man or woman—whoever it was—did. The disciples said, “***The Lord needs it,***” and this person responded immediately, “***Take it; use it; it’s yours, Lord.***”

The **Person**, the **Gift**, the **Response**, and now the **Blessing**.

The Blessing What this person did helped Jesus to fulfill His mission here on earth. I wonder how it felt when this man or woman looked out later that day and saw Jesus riding that donkey. They were probably surprised, honored, proud. “***I didn’t do much...but I had a part in this unforgettable day and this great celebration.***”

*Don’t you want to have a part in what Jesus is doing here on earth in our midst? Man, I do! I want to help Jesus fulfill His mission here on earth. I long to hear those words, “***Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness***”* (Matthew 25:23 NIV).

Nothing is too small or too big to give to Him. That’s what I want to be reminded of on this Palm Sunday.