

Today's the day we've been waiting for! Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His ministry began out in rural Galilee. But all along, he's spoken of the time when he'd need to "go up to Jerusalem." His disciples took that to mean he'd enter the holy city, establish his rule over it, and take it back for God. So, what did Jesus do in order to enter the capitol city in triumph? Sent two of them to get a donkey!

Arranging transportation is important. I know, I've got to call Ajac Auto Rental, and reserve a van every year before we go to Ponca Creek. But, it's not the heart the trip is it? No! It's minor. I'd say getting a donkey for Jesus is much like arranging vans for a mission trip. I mean, when the youth come back to share, they never talk about the vans do they? Nobody's says, "I'm sure glad P. Steve got air-conditioned, CD-player-equipped vans. So why do we hear so much about getting a donkey for Jesus to ride into Jerusalem?"

Maybe because the disciples had been so concerned about power and glory and who was the greatest! Maybe because they'd all hoped for a grander, nobler role on Jesus' big day! Though we're not told which two disciples went got donkey detail, some suspect it was James and John. Just a few hours before, they'd said to Jesus, "Hey, why don't you let us sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

Some glory! Jesus is about to go head-to-head with the powerful, take the capital city, and show the world they'd been right to follow him, and these two are sent to find a donkey! Some glory!

Some indignity! They had to tramp around a dusty town, find a stable, go in, and stand in the stench of it – with sandals on, get their feet stuck in the dirty muck, and then try to wrestle a balky beast, who might still be making messes, and stepping on their sandaled feet, back to Jesus. For this they left their fishing nets?

Remember, back in Advent, when we heard John the Baptist, calling out, "Prepare the way of the Lord!" People came to him to be baptized, so they could "Prepare the way of the Lord. That's a good definition of a disciple – one who prepares the way of the Lord. We're the ones who go get the donkey, so that he can enter town in a way that reveals who he is and what his mission is about. We're the ones who find a room, so he can have an intimate, last meal with his friends. That's how it works in the Kingdom of God.

When you're preparing the way of the Lord, you're not preparing your own. That's why learning humility, dying to your self, is so important to the work of God's Kingdom. That's why we need to be taught how to "prepare the way of the Lord!" It's counter-intuitive; it doesn't come naturally.

Jesus gathered disciples so they could have a chance to learn. He started by simply saying, "Follow me," and they left home, work, family and hit the road with him. That's the first thing they needed to learn, to follow not try to lead. As they followed, he taught them about all kinds of things - God's love, what life's like when we receive it, trust it, let it rule our lives, so that we become part of God's Kingdom.

But they had trouble following. They didn't want God's love to rule their lives; they wanted to rule their lives themselves. And since God's love is what guided Jesus, they didn't like where he was going. They wanted to be something more than "preparers of the way," especially the way he was determined to go.

No, they weren't the best students. He taught about humbling yourself, becoming a servant, taking up your cross and following him, but they were stuck on power and glory. That's why it was so important for them to get their feet stuck in something else, something very un-glorious, in that donkey stable.

For us, too, it all begins with a baptismal call to "prepare the way of the Lord." But we, too, definitely need

to be taught. At baptism, parents and church promise to work together to “prepare the way of the Lord” into our hearts, to help us learn about God’s love, what life is like when we receive it, trust it, let it rule our lives. That’s why we have worship, Sunday School, camp, Bible school, and retreats. They each give us a chance to hear Jesus teaching, learn from it, and grow as his followers.

We need those opportunities because, like Jesus’ first disciples, we’re not the best of students. We have trouble following, too. We, too, resist the rule of God’s love, because, we, too, want to rule our own lives. We, too, are into power and glory. We, too, want to be something more glorious, than preparers of the way, especially the way Jesus always goes.

Today, we rejoice that our confirmands have finished part of what the church offers to help us grow as disciples. It’s not the end. I hope they’ll continue by being a regular part of the senior high class, YF, and worship. Bethany offers worship and adult learning opportunities because being a disciple means being a student of Jesus. We never finish learning and growing, so we come together to hear and struggle with his word. Nor do we ever escape the need to follow where he leads, to go where tells us, to be preparers of his way, not our own, so we’re always called to do things for him, not for ourselves.

Discipleship begins with coming to know, love, and trust Jesus, and making him Lord of your life. It continues with giving yourself to his work – that means listening to and obeying his word, following where he goes, going where he sends you. So, it begins with coming to know and love him with your head and heart, moves on to listening to him with your ears, but finally gets expressed in your feet, with going where he tells you to go with them. With having them, and any grand ideas about how he might lift you up, humbled, trampled in the muck of some stinky stable.

Yes, those disciples needed that job, so they could put their feet on the line, step in stinky stuff, or even get them stepped on. Being a disciple means stepping in stinky stuff, or being stepped on by those who make it. No, not usually donkey pooh, but all kinds of stinky stuff that people fears and egos create!

What you’re willing to do with your feet, whether you’re willing to let them take you where Jesus says you need to go – first, wherever he goes, second, wherever he sends you, says whether or not you really want to be his follower, a preparer of his way into the hearts of others. You can’t do it, if you’re not willing to deal with the stinky stuff, all that’s hurtful, disappointing, disgusting about how people can be. After all, he put up with that all the time, yet still set his feet toward Jerusalem, and the suffering and death he’d find there. He loved his disciples and stuck with them though they were so dense and disappointing, wanting power and glory and to exclude children, then falling asleep when he most needed them to pray with him, and abandoning him when he was arrested. He loved humanity, giving himself for us, even to the point of dying, when we treated him with such cruelty and hate.

If he was willing to deal with our messes, which are much worse, more lasting and damaging than anything a donkey can produce, how can we refuse to deal with them? How can we think we’re too good? Or withhold giving all we can for God’s family and world, if he, who was truly good, didn’t?

So, “preparing the way,” also means loving him by loving those who are disappointing and make all kinds of messes. Once we learn that, we can begin to do other things, other humble thing, things that don’t seem to be part of the real action, but really are. *Once, when it was time to clean up at the end of Camp Bethany, one of our youth staff said, “I don’t do bathrooms.” Jesus would answer, “Yes, you do!”*

Without the disciples' obedience in tending to un-glorious details and finding a donkey for Jesus, there wouldn't have been a triumphal Palm Sunday. No "Hosannas!" would've been sung. They did what Jesus told them to do, found a donkey, so he could be welcomed into Jerusalem.

Elsewhere, Jesus sends his disciples out to preach, to heal, and to cast out demons from troubled people. But this Sunday let's remember that most of the time disciples, those who follow Jesus and prepare his way into the hearts of others, are called to more basic, simple stuff, that brings no glory.

The most ordinary one is getting up and getting here, to do the Sabbath work of giving God thanks and praise, hearing and being challenged by God's word, and recommitting ourselves to do it. But that's just the beginning. There are so many other things that flow from it: all kinds of giving - study, fixing up, cleaning, meals, planning, and preparation; all kinds of bearing, caring, and forgiving to. Most of it not fancy, glamorous, or likely to draw attention, but all of it the work of love, the work of God's kingdom.

Confirmands, you've had a chance to do some of this work. You've helped at Bethany Kitchen, Lunch on Us, Rake & Run, and in the nursery, and been greeters and ushers. Now, there'll be more choices: YF, Ponca Creek, 7th Day, camp staff. We offer them, because the church is always trying to nurture disciples, followers of Jesus, preparers of his way, people who find joy and meaning in doing his work, no matter how simple or basic. That's what we've been trying to do from when you were little.

But we offer these opportunities, especially for youth, because we're trying to "make disciples," "preparers of the way." So we hope you'll find a joy in serving that'll make you want to serve in other ways, wherever they may be - Vacation Bible School, the Esperanza Trip, helping with Bethany Kitchen or Lunch on Us, or the nursery, joining an adult choir, and many more. You're welcome at them all. We've nurtured you in the faith in the hope that you'll want to join us in our work as "preparers of the way," any part of it! Sometimes, we may forget that. We may think we should be free to do our projects with people most like us, who won't be a bother or a burden, and so we get exclusive, but that's not how we're called to be, and we always seek to be how Jesus calls us to be. Don't we?!

Jesus calls us to follow, and to go and do. So, go and do, don't think you can avoid the messes; Jesus and his disciples couldn't and neither can we. Do, and don't think you have to do big and grand about it; Jesus wanted his disciples to learn that small, steady, and faithful is wonderful, that goes for you, too!

You can follow Jesus! You can put your feet in motion behind him, following him. You can prepare his way! You can get your feet going to do whatever he calls you to do help him into the hearts, minds, and lives of others. It may not be glorious work, but it's his work, and if you're a true disciple that's all it needs to be - for him and his glory.

For him and his glory! May God help that to be the reason behind whatever we put our feet, our hands, our heads, or our mouths to do. For it's only in that love and humility, the same love and humility he showed us, that we become true preparers of his way. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, just as you entered Jerusalem,
...on this day enter our world, enter our hearts and lives, and come to us and rule over us.
Teach us, to serve you as you ought to be served, to walk with you where you walk,
...to go wherever you send us, to do whatever you call us to do.

Give us the strength to follow you toward the cross, not thinking about ourselves and our needs,
...but focusing upon God's reign and its triumph.

For the glory of this day, we give you thanks and praise.

For the obedience of those who found a donkey for you to ride,
...so we may view our call as disciples not as something that lifts us up, and getting for ourselves,
...but as something that humbles us, and frees us to give ourselves to you,
...we give you thanks and praise.

For the one who granted him you use of a beast of burden,
...so may we view all our possessions as items to be used in your service.

For our part in praising you through those material things we hold as stewards,
...we give you thanks and praise.

For the voices that were raised in praise,
...and for our opportunity to join in that chorus of praise today and every day, here, and in the world,
...we give you thanks and praise.

For the moment that was seized by so many, the time so urgent that is rarely repeated,
...the now that is upon us, to praise and welcome you, God's anointed One,
...we give you thanks and praise.

We pray for those who are persecuted for proclaiming you as Lord.

We pray for ourselves, and our fear of persecution, that keeps us from truly proclaiming you as Lord.

Living the faith that we affirm is not easy.

The powers of sin and evil, the many temptations of the world,
...our own fear and pride, greed and jealousy get in the way.

That's why we pray the young people who affirm their baptism today.

Help them deal with the powers arrayed against them,
...and with the powers within with which we all must struggle.

If they sin, as we all do, grant them the strength to recognize and confess it,
...so that by owning and repenting of it, rather than denying it, it may not come to possess them.
Help us to be a faith family that demonstrates, encourages and welcomes such honest humility.

King of kings, Lord of lords, blessed are you who come into our midst this day.

Help us to count the cost of discipleship and proclaim you, not only as savior,
...but as the redeemer who transforms our lives.

We pray in your name for those known to us with special needs...

Gracious Lord, be in all these situations with all these people, with your love and peace. Amen.

