

Matthew 21:1-11 (NRSV) - Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately.^[a]" ⁴This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

⁵"Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd^[b] spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

¹⁰When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" ¹¹The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Matthew 26:36-46 (NRSV) - Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." ³⁹And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." ⁴⁰Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? ⁴¹Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial;^[c] the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴²Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Finding Your Purpose: Listening to Your Heart

You may remember reading some of the amazing testimony of Corrie ten Boom. Corrie and her entire family were incarcerated during World War II after helping more than 800 Jews escape the Nazi's. Corrie's testimony of suffering in the concentration camps, and God's grace through it all, touched millions of lives. Quite a few years ago, after Corrie had received a prestigious honorary degree, she was asked if it was difficult to remain humble while hearing and receiving so much acclaim. She replied to the inquiring reporter immediately: "Young man, when Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments in the road and singing praises, do you think that for moment it ever entered the head of that donkey that any of that was for him?" She continued, "If I can be the donkey on which Jesus Christ rides in his glory, I give him all the praise and all the honor." Corrie had listened to her heart and found her purpose! And she took action in life-changing ways.

Palm Sunday is another one of the major events in our salvation history which is filled with a thousand small, and vitally important details. The major event is setting the stage for Jesus' final major conflict with the temple leaders. Within this amazing parade, Jesus was greeted in royal fashion (literally) as the long-awaited liberating ruler / Messiah. And yet, the smaller details of the acquisition of a donkey (and a colt in Matthew's gospel) upon which Jesus would ride, set the scene for the humble grandeur of this hinge-point in Jesus earthly experience, as well as that of the human family with which Jesus was engaged. For acquiring the donkey and colt upon which Jesus would ride required the obedience of the disciples, the obedience of the owners of the animals, and the cooperation of the animals themselves. Each one needed to **listen** to the willingness of their hearts, trust their **purpose** in the grander scheme of God's plan, and take **action** as an instrument in forwarding Christ's reign.

And as Jesus rode into Jerusalem, literally parading a new form of faith in front of those invested with the power to control the lives of others, the crowds shouted, "Hosanna" which means "save us now!" Times were desperate! Roman rulers and faith leaders alike were oppressing the common folks through tyranny, violence, and brutality. Life and livelihood were tenuous at best, as there were few limits to the murderous whims of those in control. "Hosanna!" "Save us now," they cried out in hope of deliverance. The question became, was this Jesus among them to deliver them according to their desires, or according to God's plan, or both? When they listened to their hearts, what is the purpose God conveys? What action does God require?

Even Jesus wrestled with this, as we heard from the passage describing his prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemene. Just prior to Jesus' arrest, we hear of Jesus' time of listening to his **heart**, that love-connection with God. In so doing, he clarifies his **purpose** when he asks, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want, but what you want." The response of God sets God's will into **action**.

Most of us wrestle with clarifying our purpose as we endeavor to serve Christ faithfully amidst our humanness. Limitations, lack of courage, temptations, and failings, all contribute to questioning God's intentions for each human life. And so we continue to inquire, and hope, and listen, and clarify how and why God is calling us to live and serve the Christ who came to save even us. And, we also have the assurance that God is calling each of us to find our purpose of influencing another's life with the gospel message.

Bill Wilson pastored an inner city church in New York City. His mission field was a very violent place. He was stabbed twice as he ministered to the people of the community surrounding the church. At one point, a Puerto Rican woman became involved in the church and was led to Christ. After her conversion she came to Pastor Wilson and said, "I want to do something to help with the church's ministry." He asked her what her talents were and she could think of nothing - she could barely speak a few sentences in English - but she did love children. So, Bill put her on one of the church's busses that went into the neighborhoods and transported kids to church. Every week she performed her duties. She would find the worst-looking kid on the bus, put him or her in the seat next to her and whisper over and over some of the few words she had learned in English: "I love you. Jesus loves you."

After several months, she became attached to one little boy in particular. This boy did not speak. He came to Sunday School every week with his sister and sat next to the woman, but he never made a sound. Each week she would tell him all the way to Sunday School and all the way home, "I love you and Jesus loves you. I love you and Jesus loves you."

One day, to her amazement, the little boy turned to her and stammered, "I - I - I love you too!" Then he put his arms around her and gave her a big hug. That was 2:30 on a Sunday afternoon. At 6:30 that evening, he was found dead. His own mother had beaten him to death and thrown his body in the trash. "I love you and Jesus loves you." Those were some of the last words this little boy heard in his short life - from the lips of a Puerto Rican woman who could barely speak English. This woman had listened to her **heart**, found her **purpose**, and took **action** to give that little boy the love that he would never experience in his own home.

"If I can be the donkey on which Jesus Christ rides in his glory, I give him all the praise and all the honor." Corrie ten Boom professed. Last week I mentioned the importance of listening to the students who would be leading us in the March for Our Lives, which took place in hundreds of cities in the U.S. and on every continent around this world. Several persons from this congregation were in attendance at the March here in Buffalo yesterday. There I heard the anguished pleas of students who have suffered from violence, fear, uncertainty, lack of security. They had listened to their **hearts**, and had a clear **purpose**, and they took **action**: to make life and the pursuit of an education safe, free from fear, devoid of violence, an opportunity to flourish and serve within a community. These students were courageous in speaking out, rallying support, seeking to make our communities more loving, and tolerant, and healthy. Oh that followers of Jesus would speak out with such courage and passion! And those students are demanding no less from us: that we listen with our hearts, identify a clear purpose, and take action to make our communities, nation and world more loving, safe, and healthy.

"Hosanna" Save us now! May we give Christ all the praise and all the honor!

"Listen, to the sigh of the soul. Listen silence speaks in the heart.
Listen, God is singing, God is singing!"