
“He Chose You” Lenten Series
“He Chose...A Donkey”

Palm Sunday

Matthew 21:1-9

#7 In The Series

“Matthew 21:1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest!”

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” 11 The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Matthew 21:1-9 (NIV)

Children’s Sermon: “The Passion Story”

Needed: A number of objects representing various parts of Jesus’ passion—30 silver coins, thorns, nails, palm branches, a plastic hen, a cross.

Directions: Briefly tell the story of the passion using each one of the objects to describe the story.

Sermon:

Sometime ago I remember going to a horse auction held in Columbus, Ohio, adjacent to Ohio State University. There were lots of people there looking at all kinds of horses of many different breeds. Some paid tens of thousands of dollars for their horses, with high hopes.

As I reflected on this experience, none of them bid on a donkey. Oh, donkeys were there but somehow donkeys just didn’t have the same desirability.

What is it that makes a horse so desirable and a donkey, well, unwanted?

?? Could it be because donkeys are beasts of burden? They’re the slaves of the equestrian world.

?? Could it be because donkeys have no social standing, no dignity? After all, who of us have ever seen a statue honoring a general or famous war hero mounted on a donkey? No, it doesn’t happen.

?? Are donkeys unwanted because they’re the low-life, the humblest of the four-legged creatures?

- ?? Are donkeys unwanted because they’re often associated with poverty? After all, the only place that I know that donkeys are commonly used is in third and fourth world countries where there are no cars, trucks and roads.
- ?? And how many times have you heard a child say, “When I grow up, I want to learn to ride a donkey!” Yes, there are equestrian organizations, pony clubs and the like. But have you ever heard of “Donkey Club?”

And, I suggest, you won’t. Why? Unlike horses which have status, standing, dignity and power. Donkeys are reserved for county fairs—to laugh at. Every horse rider knows there’s something about a horse that makes you stand tall in the saddle. I challenge you to find someone who feels “tall in the saddle” riding a donkey!

But there is one person who did. Jesus. Palm Sunday is the day we celebrate one of Jesus’ most remarkable choices on the way to the cross. He chose to ride into Jerusalem “tall in the saddle” on a donkey.

Why did Jesus choose a donkey? Because Jesus’ earthly ministry is better reflected by a donkey than a horse.

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, He knew he was going to die. He knew He was going to be betrayed, unjustly tried, beaten, mocked and crucified. In light of this, He made several remarkable choices. He *chose* to endure the mocking of a robe, He *chose* the scorn of a crown of thorns, He *chose* the pain of a soldier’s fist, He *chose* betrayal by a friend, and He *chose* the nails of the cross. And, today, we recognize that He chose a donkey.

As I reflect on Jesus’ choice, what makes these choices even more extraordinary is that He made these choices knowing His death was imminent.

My experience with people who are dying is that many of them have a strong urge to do one lasting, unforgettable thing to express their love. Why? I believe it’s because when they realize they have such little time left, they want those closest to them to remember how much they love them.

What various individuals do varies widely. But one thing they all have in common is this. Whatever they did, they *chose* to do...because of love.

There’s something special to being able to make a last, final choice to show love. In choosing a donkey, Jesus was showing us His love for us, the sacrifice He was making, and showing us how He had given up everything this world has to offer to die for us.

Tim McGraw has a song entitled, “Live Like You’re Dying.” In it, he describes a person in their mid-forties who got bad news from his doctor. He was sick with a terminal disease. When a friend asked him, “How will you live the rest of your life?” he answered, “I’m gonna live like I’m dying.”

When you know you’re going to die, sometimes it puts life in a very clear perspective. It makes you start living your life “Like your dyin’.”

Jesus knew that He was going to die. As a result, He diverted His focus away from the unimportant things of this world and directed His life to what God called Him to do.

Tim McGraw’s lyrics, “Someday I hope you get the chance To live like you were dyin’” is good advice.

St. Paul gave the same advice. In Romans 6 Paul wrote,

“Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ...Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”

Romans 6:3,8 (NIV)

When we were baptized, we died the same death as Christ. We died with Him. And now, we can “Live like we’re dyin’” .

In Mark 8, Jesus told us to live like we’re dying.

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.” Mark 8:34-35 (NIV)

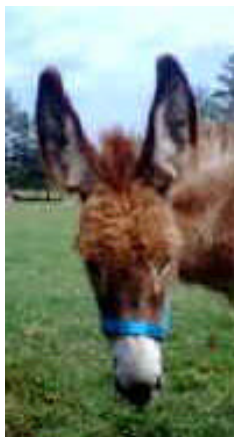
Are you living like you’re dying...losing your life, daily taking up His cross and following Him?

What would you do if you knew you only had five days to live? What things would you discard? What regrets would you seek to address? What changes in priorities would you consider? What things that you thought were so important would you now cast aside as unimportant?

Jesus’ choice of the donkey makes His choice clear—*crystal clear!* He was following God’s calling for Him.

What’s *your* choice? Will it be to follow God’s calling for you? Will it be to “live like you’re dyin’?” If you can’t, consider the donkey on which Jesus rode. He made the right choice. How about you?

There’s a legend called “*The Legend Of The Donkey Cross.*” I’d like to share it with you.



“The Legend of the Donkey Cross”

"Bring me the colt of a donkey,"
was the Master's request.

A young donkey was brought to Jesus
to carry Him to Jerusalem.

A week later Jesus was ordered crucified.

The little donkey so loved the Lord,
that he wanted to help carry the cross.

But alas, he was pushed away.

The sad little donkey waited to say good-bye
until nearly all had left.
As he turned to leave, the shadow of the cross
fell upon his shoulders.
And there it has remained,
a tribute to the loyalty and love
of the humblest of God's Creatures.

Perhaps now we know why Jesus chose the donkey. It was because He knew the donkey would be willing to bear His cross regardless of the cost. Yes, the donkey, of all animals in creation, was willing to “live like he was dyin’”...serving and bearing Jesus every step of the way.

No, Jesus didn't need a horse. He didn't need an entourage. He didn't need to have servants convey Him around in a royal procession. No, Jesus knew that to serve God and to fulfill His purpose, He needed to detach Himself from worldly expectations, from the expectations of society, of the crowds, of the religious leaders of His day and, I dare say, His family.

As Jesus looked to the reality of His death and His divine calling, He knew that He had to “live each day like He was dyin’.” Because He lived each day “like He was dying,” Jesus was freed to realize God's calling for Him and show His love for us...to the max.

Tim McGraw's song, “Live Like You're Dying” concludes,

Like tomorrow was a gift
And you got eternity to think about what'd you do with it
What would you do with it
What did I do with it
What would I do with it?

Jesus lived like He was dying. So He chose a donkey...to give His life for you and me. What an amazing gift!

Now, I ask, “What will you do with your life? What will you do with this gift?” Let us start living like we're dying, take up Jesus' cross, and chose to follow Him. Amen.

Thomas F. Fischer