

Are We Untying Anything for the Lord

Luke 19:28-40

Palm Sunday

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There once was a lovely but quite poor old woman known to all by the name of “Old Betty.” Old Betty made it a habit to visit those who were sick as often as possible, and she gave of the little money she did have to people who had even less. And as she did, she told everyone about the love of God in Jesus Christ. One day, Old Betty grew very sick. She lay in bed month after month, worn down by pain and helplessness. During one of the visits from her minister, he asked whether it was all a terribly difficult change for her, given how active she had been. Old Betty gently replied, “No sir, not at all. When I was well, I used to hear the Lord say day by day, 'Betty, go here. Betty, go there. Betty, do this. Betty do that,' and I used to do it as well as I could. And now I hear him instruct me every day, saying, 'Betty, just lie still, Betty, just cough.'” Old Betty displayed a truly **obedient** heart, whether serving others or struggling for a breath. She loved and served the Lord in good times and bad times, whether it was to help the Lord help others, or to help her. She had no agenda other than to be obedient to the directions she was given by God, both through the printed word of the Bible and through the Holy Spirit’s interpretation in her heart. This gave her a constant sense of peace and joy, all the days of her life.

What do you think of when you hear the word “**obedience?**” Do you think of obedience as a peaceful, joyful sort of way to live? Or does it feel more restrictive, perhaps even oppressive? Lately, Rich has been trying to teach our pet gerbils to **obey** commands the same way he would teach a dog. With a seed in his hand, he says “give me your paw” and all they do is look at him all beady-eyed before quickly burying their heads in shredded toilet paper rolls. Cute, but not quite the same as a dog trick.

When we think of obedience in the human world, we reflect on people who faithfully serve others. We think of the many men and women who serve their neighbors near and far through helping and healing professions – like police officers, fire fighters, medics, doctors and nurses. And, of course we think of all those who are serving in our country’s military. Rather than just obeying to get a treat, so to speak, these special individuals obey the call in their lives, often at great personal risk, to protect everyone’s safety and community well-being, all while promoting the divinely inspired ideals of life, liberty and justice for all.

A quick check of a dictionary tells us that the word we know as “obey” is originally from a Latin word meaning, roughly, “to turn our hearing toward.” In other words, obeying has much to do with who we are **listening** to, and with understanding why we feel compelled to do so. Of all the people we Christians feel compelled to obey, Jesus is – need I even say it? – the most important. But why do we do so? Do we feel we should be obedient because that’s what others expect of us? Or is it because we have a deep, personal relationship with Him for which we feel very grateful? Maybe you aren’t comfortable asking questions when it comes to matters of faith. I believe, however, as I know Rich does, that we do need to ask questions in order to strengthen our relationship with the Lord. It’s how we keep our faith fresh and relevant to our lives. It’s how we come to understand the Bible as our most important tool for living a righteous life, rather than just as a book of old sayings and instructions. So, this morning, let’s ask a question of the Gospel of Luke – Why should we obey Jesus and what does He want us to do in obedience to Him?

According to the account in Luke we heard read earlier, we **turn our hearing toward** Jesus because He is the most wonderful, most authoritative, crystal clear example of what it means to be faithful to God’s word as it is found in the Bible. Jesus was a teacher of the Hebrew Scriptures, what we know today as the Old Testament. His perfect union with God the Father, the Author of all things, gave him the knowledge of every detail of every story, law, teaching, poem and prophecy. Even still, he studied it all for nearly thirty years before he began teaching and healing and revealing to the world what he was up to. So he knew ... he knew from the Hebrew Scriptures, that it was his responsibility, his purpose for living, to take all of our sins and sufferings and make them his own. Every wrong thought, word and action we’ve ever had toward others, ourselves and above all God, Jesus knew he was destined to take the blame. Like someone paying off a several million dollar debt with no strings attached, he understood he was to take it all so **we** could start over and have a clean account with God once again. And he knew ... he knew from the Hebrew Scriptures, that the cost would be his life; with the big pay-off coming when he would journey to Jerusalem, the City of David, and endure every form of human suffering imaginable. Even though he **knew** his execution was certain, he was obedient to the end because he loved us more than we can ever really possibly know.

One big piece of what Jesus knew and was obedient to, was revealed through the Old Testament prophet named Zechariah. Zechariah found himself preaching that the day

was coming when a new King would come to Jerusalem, the holy city of God's chosen people, and that this new king would arrive "triumphant and victorious" yet "humble" and riding on a colt. Upon his arrival, he would "command peace" to every nation of the world, and his rule would be from sea to sea, to the ends of the earth. (Zech. 9).

Zechariah was speaking of Emmanuel! Of Jesus! The Son of God, the King of Kings.

Luke tells us that Jesus indeed did ask for a colt just before entering the holy city. Not some amazing war-worn stallion, but just a little old donkey. He didn't concern himself with how this might look or with how many people would actually understand why he was doing it – he knew only to be obedient to God's Word.

To do this, though, he needed help from his friends, his disciples. He commanded them to go and borrow someone's colt, to untie it and to say only that the Lord had need of it. Maybe these disciples thought the idea of entering Jerusalem on a donkey would not exactly signal to all the people that Israel's King of Kings, Lord of Lords had arrived to win back the holy city. Or maybe they were familiar with Zechariah's prophecy. Either way, what these disciples did know, and what they have to teach us, is that *even the smallest act of obedience to Jesus is in service to **Jesus' greater act of obedience.*** Asking a stranger to borrow his colt, to untie it for the Lord, may not have been as impressive a job as going on a big mission trip or becoming a minister of the Word and Sacrament. And yet it **was** ... for if this had not been done, there might well have been a bump in the bigger plan mapped out in the Bible. The grand pageant that was that very first Palm Sunday just might not have come to fulfill that which was prophesied long ago.

And so, no one thing done in the name of the Lord is a small thing! Obedience, both great and small, when grounded in God's word, is of great value to the ministry of reconciliation and liberation to which Jesus was born. If you read closely, there isn't any mention of royal palm branches in Luke's Gospel. He simply was not concerned with the telling of all the regal trimmings of the event. Instead, he wants us to stay focused on that symbol of simple obedience – on going and untying a colt just because the Lord had need of it. He wants us to read this part of his Gospel, especially today and throughout this Holy Week now upon us, and consider what **we** are untying for the Lord.

In what ways are we like Old Betty? What small acts of obedience are we doing to help carry on Jesus' greater act of restoring all of humanity's relationship with God, of showing the world that he truly is the King of Kings?

May Jesus' example inspire us always. May we forever find ourselves *turning our hearing* toward Him, obeying him as he obeyed his heavenly Father, so that we too may know true peace and joy throughout our life's journeys. Amen.