**Sermon for Palm Sunday The Church of the Transfiguration, Toronto**

**Rev David Howells 2107-04-09**

Today we celebrate the triumphal entry into Jerusalem of Jesus as Messiah. This is a big event! Yet in the Gospel story it gets less press than the donkey. Why such a long story about a short horse? Perhaps because it is not a horse....

Everyone knew that what Jesus was about to do was a big event. It was the public culmination of his ministry so far, and as the Passover celebrations were getting into full swing, and the city was crowded with devout pilgrims. It was important to make a big impact.

Three out of the four Gospels have this story, and so we know that it was a key part of the Early Church’s understanding of Jesus. And the story is a paradigm of understatement.

Two disciples are called by Jesus.

Two disciples, so unimportant that no one seems able to have found out their names.

They are given detailed instructions about where to find the donkey, and a password; “The Lord needs it”, should they be challenged. Jesus has obviously gone to some trouble to set this all up. There has been a plan. It mattered.

Back to the donkey.

Have you ever ridden a donkey? I have. I was 10 years old and even then my feet dragged on the sand of the English seaside resort where donkey rides were popular. The donkey was called Charlie. It was dramatically uncomfortable and I felt foolish sitting on such a small, low animal. It was, at best, comical. There is no way you can feel in command of the situation on a donkey. There is no hope of impressing anyone on a donkey. And if you get a colt, a baby donkey, which will be skittish under you, unused to being ridden, there is a very good chance you will fall off and look even more un-cool than ever.

I imagine what it was like for these two disciples. If I were one of Jesus’ disciples, and he called me and my buddy over, I would be so excited! “I am going to be useful to the Lord! We are being given an important and honourable job to do. This is so great!!!” Then I am told about the donkey. Well... not quite what I was hoping for.

Today’s parallel might be like being one of the staffers of an election campaign. It seems that your candidate has won and he asks you to get him the car for the motorcade into the Capital. You imagine going off to bring back a Cadillac Escalade, black, huge-engined, tinted windows, the car of presidents and men of authority. Yes! That speaks of power! Then he says “I want you to rent an open-top, baby Fiat. Pink please.” After the shock wears off, ask “What is being said by the car?”

A friend of mine, David Kupp, a teacher at Wycliffe, once preached about the “Upside Down Kingdom” of God. Not Authority, but Service. Not Power but Vulnerability. Not Force but Invitation. Not a Bulldozer but a Gift held in an open palm. Not Victory but Self-Offering and even Death.

I am chronically fashioned by the values of our North American culture. My inner life is still populated by acts of James Bond-like heroism and spectacular victories over the bad guys. I still live in the “Right way Up” Kingdom, the “get to the top” model of values. But Jesus is constantly inviting me to live his subversive way.

The teaching of Palm Sunday is subversion at its clearest in the Gospels. The preposterous donkey is a signpost of inverted power. The Cross is the emblem of how the light comes into the darkness and the darkness is unable to comprehend it.

Our clue in all of this is, I think, the two disciples, unimportant and unnamed. That is who I must look to and learn from.

Most of us, as we live out our part of the Gospels in Toronto in these years, are like these two unrecorded people. We do not get asked to be heroic or to take the Good News to darkest North York. We are not called to anything but what we are,who we are, and where we are. Like the disciples who were just there at the time and did what was asked of them.

To be not glorious, but who you are, is hard enough.

It is the path of holiness. These two unnamed disciples and Charlie the donkey.

Holiness, you see, in these two disciples, is made up, not of dramatic feats of spiritual gymnastics. Just of ordinary tasks of life. “Go and get me a donkey, would you?”... “A donkey? OK then...”

Holiness is practiced in small things, in the present, the now, the actuality of life.

Holiness is folding laundry with love and in peace.

It is washed dishes, cooked meals, visits to the person who lives alone and is lonely and is perhaps difficult.

It is in caring for family and friends.

It is in pay-slips and letters written on birthdays to those you might forget.

It is, because we are here at Transfiguration, and here there are paths of holiness put out for us, that we can begin to be lowly and humble ourselves.

It is in reading the Scriptures without applause and serving coffee without congratulations.

It is in working on committees without being more important, or noticed, than the least of them.

Finance Committee work without making a personal profit.

Working for justice without being more seen than those who we are trying finally to notice.

It is in making sure that the last one to leave goes with a blessing,

and the lights are switched off with a whispered prayer,

and the outer door is shut and locked up at last, with gratitude.

Holiness is being a disciple without a name remembered, but who acted in obedience and faith to the one who called you.

Holiness is doing small things with great love.

Holiness is doing the un-glorious donkey-work of carrying the kingdom of heaven, even one inch forward, in your life, in your world.

It is to find that the One, who sees in secret, and in secret, rewards you with a smile.

Just as Jesus, I imagine, entering the gates of Jerusalem, knowing what lay before him, turned his head, caught the eyes of those two disciples and grinned with eye-twinkling delight.

May we all, like those two and the donkey, be content and joyful,

not only because what we do is a blessing,

but that who we are is left quietly aside, in peace and love.

May we be blessed to have a low place in the upside down kingdom of Palm Sunday.