

2018 Palm Sunday
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Mark's gospel opens with John the Baptist crying out, "*Prepare ye the way for the Lord!*" (1:3)

Shortly thereafter, Jesus appears on the scene, and after his baptism and confrontation of Satan in the desert, he announces
Mark 1:15 "*The time has come,*" he said. "*The Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!*"

Excitement builds as he calls disciples, making what must have been an intoxicating promise:

Mark 1:17-18 "*Come, follow me,*" ... "*and I will send you out to fish for people.*"

Weighty stuff.

Sure, they started out as a rag tag band walking around the Galilean countryside, but as Jesus' reputation as a teacher and healer grew, he built a solid following.

His disciples began to feel pretty important, too.

Anticipation built over the months as Jesus over and over told his followers that they were heading for Jerusalem to establish a new Kingdom.

The fall of the brutal Roman occupation must be near.

As the Jerusalem skyline drew near, the Zebedee brothers couldn't contain themselves any longer.

Mark 10:35-37 *Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."*

"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

Now, the big day has arrived – Jerusalem with its ancient walls and gates crowded with pilgrims loom in sight, just over the Kidron Valley.

Finally, Jesus will be proclaimed king.

There may even have been whispers running through the crowds that a rabbi claiming to be the messiah was approaching.

Roman guards were on high alert for the Passover as tens of thousands of pilgrims flood the city.

Anticipation built among the disciples who had waited so long for this day.

They could hardly wait to prepare the way for the Lord.

Now would be their day of vindication and glory.

And what does Jesus have them do?

Well, nearly half of the verses that Mark devotes to Jesus' Triumphal Entry deal with arranging transportation.

The Gospels don't specify which disciples are delegated this task, but it makes perfect sense, given James and John's request to be a part of Jesus cabinet, that they would be the ones given the "donkey duty".

Clearly Jesus had planned carefully for his entry.

He had all the details in mind: that he'd ride a donkey, where to find the foal, even what to say to the owner to assure its use.

Why is Jesus being so particular?

Why not just call an Uber?

That is because he was fulfilling Zechariah's prophesy of the long-awaited Messiah.

Zechariah 9:9 Lo, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious, humble and riding on donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Getting this detail right is why Mark devotes half his Palm Sunday verses it.

Sometimes we think that spirituality is unconcerned with details – that it is just "going with the flow", being led by the Spirit in the moment.

Spiritual people, we might think, have simple lives unworried by mortgages, yearly physicals, and kids' soccer schedules.

But that's not the biblical understanding of spirituality.

Here we see Jesus, himself, carefully planning, sweating the details to get this right.

James and John had been busy planning for glory, but they learn that sometimes faithful discipleship means doing the advance work of bargaining with a donkey dealer.

Throughout the gospel of Mark, the disciples are largely portrayed as befuddled and with Jesus' teaching going right over their heads.

But here, at least, they get it right: they are faithful, doing the mundane preparations for all the cheering and hosannas that soon will welcome Jesus to Jerusalem.

Elsewhere, they also were called to some preaching, healing and casting out of demons, but it turns out that most of faithful discipleship is more mundane.

Like the hours that Mike Holcomb spends in the line items of the budget.

Hours no one sees him do, for a task this is largely thankless, but without which there would be no ministry here.

And Dave Weiland on his hands and knees wiring our new monitors and routing cables.

And the way our worship team arrives early to put prayer cards in the pew racks, and fill the communion trays.

And like the way Rob and Paul clean the gutters, and Wilda and others pull weeds.

And like the coordination required for game nights and fund raisers, and the printing of welcome brochures.

And the time that musicians spend rehearsing, setting up mics, putting music into the notebooks and then refileing it back in the shelves after Sunday worship.

And Laura and Vivienne cleaning and the sanctuary garden and placing stones and new plants.

And rental contracts, brainstorming about teaching ideas, music planning, Erneal cleaning the building, managing the food pantry, sending cards to people in need, folding bulletins, proof reading material before it is printed, Mary mailing orders of worship to people who missed Sunday service, giving an evening to a team meeting, praying for people in need, taking lasagna to someone who is ill or grieving.

No one notices most of these things – but they are the acts of faithful disciples who prepare the way for our ministry.

These seemingly small gestures are fulfilling the will of the Almighty God - preparing the way for Jesus to make his entrance into the world.