

## Palm Sunday Sermon

### Matthew 21:1-11

### Phil 2:5-11

Donkeys were the Toyota Corollas of Bible Times. Necessary, needed, everywhere and valued as part of your wealth. There but easy to overlook. There is a delightful account in Numbers 22:21-32 where a donkey shows more spiritual insight than its owner:

*But God was angry that Balaam was going, so he sent the angel of the LORD to stand in the road to block his way. As Balaam and two servants were riding along, <sup>23</sup> Balaam's donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand. The donkey bolted off the road into a field, but Balaam beat it and turned it back onto the road. <sup>24</sup> Then the angel of the LORD stood at a place where the road narrowed between two vineyard walls. <sup>25</sup> When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, it tried to squeeze by and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall. So Balaam beat the donkey again. <sup>26</sup> Then the angel of the LORD moved farther down the road and stood in a place too narrow for the donkey to get by at all. <sup>27</sup> This time when the donkey saw the angel, it lay down under Balaam. In a fit of rage Balaam beat the animal again with his staff.*

<sup>28</sup> *Then the LORD gave the donkey the ability to speak. "What have I done to you that deserves your beating me three times?" it asked Balaam.*

<sup>29</sup> *"You have made me look like a fool!" Balaam shouted. "If I had a sword with me, I would kill you!"*

<sup>30</sup> *"But I am the same donkey you have ridden all your life," the donkey answered. "Have I ever done anything like this before?"*

*"No," Balaam admitted.*

<sup>31</sup> *Then the LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the roadway with a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam bowed his head and fell face down on the ground before him.*

<sup>32</sup> *"Why did you beat your donkey those three times?" the angel of the LORD demanded. "Look, I have come to block your way because you are stubbornly resisting me.*

Perhaps the lesson for us is that when donkeys are in events in the Bible, we need to pay more attention. Today is Palm Sunday and there is a donkey in the event.....

Jesus on a donkey riding into Jerusalem. This symbolic act already long pointed to by the prophet Zechariah: (Matthew 21v5)

*"Tell the people of Jerusalem, <sup>[a]</sup>*

*'Look, your King is coming to you.*

*He is humble, riding on a donkey—*

*riding on a donkey's colt."<sup>[b]</sup>*

**A humble righteous, victorious king.** This in the face of a crowd that could only see this king in terms of an earthly kingdom on a throne in Jerusalem. Their paradigm of kingship was limited in its scope and understanding and therefore they were blind to what they should have been seeing. Just like Balaam. Yet the donkey is a much bigger clue than it at first seems.

In Genesis 49:10-11 we read this insightful prophecy, the last words of Jacob to his sons:

*The scepter will not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler's staff from his descendants,<sup>[a]</sup>  
until the coming of the one to whom it belongs,<sup>[b]</sup>  
the one whom all nations will honor.*

<sup>11</sup> *He ties his foal to a grapevine,  
the colt of his donkey to a choice vine.  
He washes his clothes in wine,  
his robes in the blood of grapes.*

**A different kind of kingdom, all nations. Wine, blood, communion wine, Last Supper.** Are we reading too much into this reference to a far off descendant of Jacob, the one all nations will honour? Are these donkeys beginning to fill out the purpose and calling of Jesus, the Messiah?

The story of Abraham is well known. Called by God to follow him on a journey to a new land. Infertile with no prospect for children - and then Isaac. Then God asks him to take his son to be sacrificed and he trusts God and God provides another sacrifice. (Genesis 22)

*Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called.*

*"Yes," he replied. "Here I am."*

<sup>2</sup> *"Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."*

<sup>3</sup> *The next morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son, Isaac.*

A journey on a donkey. A Father and his beloved son. A journey to a place of **sacrifice**. Slowly the Palm Sunday journey begins to fill out with layers of meaning.

Genesis 42 drops us into the story of Joseph.

*Joseph then ordered his servants to fill the men's sacks with grain, but he also gave secret instructions to return each brother's payment at the top of his sack. He also gave them supplies for their journey home. <sup>26</sup> So the brothers loaded their donkeys with the grain and headed for home.*

<sup>27</sup> *But when they stopped for the night and one of them opened his sack to get grain for his donkey, he found his money in the top of his sack. <sup>28</sup> "Look!" he exclaimed to his brothers. "My money has been returned; it's here in my sack!" Then their hearts sank. Trembling, they said to each other, "What has God done to us?"*

In the money in the sacks on a donkey they found **mercy** and the dawning of **forgiveness**.

Another donkey. This time the story involves Moses. He has spent many years of his life being prepared for this journey. He has encountered God at the burning bush and given the responsibility to lead his people out of slavery to the promised land: Now the journey begins. He will **rescue** his people.

Exodus 4: 20: *So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey, and headed back to the land of Egypt. In his hand he carried the staff of God.*

The donkeys give us the clues to interpret Palm Sunday. It is a journey of a humble, righteous victorious king. Bringing about a different kind of kingdom. Remembered with

wine symbolising blood. It will involve the sacrifice of The Beloved Son. It brings mercy and forgiveness. Through this sacrifice his people will be rescued from bondage.

Donkeys are quite eloquent when we give them a chance to speak!

One last donkey. Jesus told a story that reminds us how, we who are the beneficiaries of the Palm Sunday journey that led to so much more should live in response to what God has done for us. It is the story of the Good Samaritan or perhaps we could rename it The Good Neighbour. I leave you with one small quote from it.

*Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. <sup>34</sup> Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him*

To remind you of what I said in my letter mid week..Can I encourage you, when you shop, to the extent that you are able, to start buying something extra. Start putting together a care package. In the weeks ahead there are going to be many opportunities for us to practically demonstrate the love of Jesus. I am reminded of the words of Jesus: If you have two coats and your brother has none..... If we have two cans, two loaves of bread and our neighbour has none....In the weeks to come being a Good Samaritan will need to be a regular habit in our lives. It is for such a time as this that Jesus gave the world the church. Lets saddle up our donkey and follow him on his journey into Jerusalem.

This Palm Sunday, worship will come to you again from the Christ Church Whanganui team within the Revs Billy and Caleb Rowe's bubble, and Bishop Ellie will bring the sermon. From Monday 6th to Wednesday 8th April at 7.30pm each evening, the Revs Stephen King and Jean Malcolm at St Peter's on Willis in Wellington will lead us in Easter Week liturgies. As we approach the climax of Holy Week, we return to Whanganui on the evening of the 9th for a Maundy Thursday reflection at 7.30pm, and again on Good Friday at 10am we gather in reflection.

Every year we gather together in a service of Chrism in which we re-affirm our baptismal vows together. For many of us this one of the highlights of our liturgical year. We will gather again 'in' Whanganui for this Easter Vigil service, and hear again from Bishop Ellie. And on Sunday, we join together again from Whanganui at 10am in resurrection joy, and hear from Bishop Justin. As Holy Week approaches, we encourage you to discuss with your bubble, house church or other worshipping network the ways that you will mark this Easter season in lockdown together. In journeying creatively alongside each other as Christ's body we will draw nearer to God, grow in faith and unity, and be a witness of hope to our anxious world.

Services will be streamed live on Freeview Channel 200 and at [movementonline.org.nz](http://movementonline.org.nz)  
Sunday 10am - Palm Sunday Service with +Justin and +Ellie  
Monday 7.30pm - Easter Week Liturgy with St Peter's on Willis St  
Tuesday 7.30pm - Easter Week Liturgy with St Peter's on Willis St  
Wednesday 7.30pm - Easter Week Liturgy with St Peter's on Willis St  
Thursday 7.30pm - Maundy Thursday Service from Whanganui  
Friday 10am - Good Friday Reflection from Whanganui

Saturday 7.30pm - Chrism Service from Whanganui  
Sunday 10am - Easter Sunday Service from Whanganui

# 12 Hour Prayer Vigil For Covid-19

[Key diocesan eventNews](#)

4 Apr

After our livestream service on Maundy Thursday we will be waiting and listening to Jesus overnight through a Diocesan wide prayer vigil. We are encouraging each mission unit to book in for a one hour prayer vigil spot and encourage their parishioners to actively engage in worship during this time.

The link to register for a slot is <http://www.24-7prayer.com/signup/df02b2> - please use the name of the Mission Unit in the 'my name is' box. More than one mission unit can of course pray during the same time slot - but it would be great to have the complete 12-hour vigil filled. Further information will be made available here as well as being emailed out to those who have registered.

We will be creating a dedicated page on the Movement Online website which will contain prayer resources including a one hour guided prayer session with both printed and video options. During this hour we will be focussing on praying for those affected by Covid-19, praying for a restoration and revival of the church in this season, and first and foremost we will call on the Holy Spirit to help us in our weakness, and ask for the Spirit himself to intercede through us.

Following this vigil we will be looking at ways to open a Diocesan wide intercession network. If you would like more information please contact us by emailing [prayer@anglicanmovement.nz](mailto:prayer@anglicanmovement.nz)