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“A Donkey’s Palm Sunday”

Read Sherman

Trinity-Anjou Pastoral Charge

Sunday, April 9, 2017

Scriptures: Matthew 21:1-11

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be a witness, O God, to your Way of love, justice and faithful walking with us. Amen.

Hi! My name is Buddy and I want to share a story with you that happened to me when I was just a wee colt. I’m pretty old now, and I hear there is some confusion about the events of Palm Sunday, and I mean to put that right. You may have heard that Mark’s story is older, and supposedly more accurate than Matthew’s. Mark had it that only I accompanied Jesus into Jerusalem, whereas Matthew’s version says it was me and my mother. So there is the puzzle that needs solving. Well, as my sainted mother, God bless her, used to say, “You can never tell a horse by its tail,” and she meant it too.

“No,” she’d say, “you’ve got to look at the whole horse before you know what you’re getting” (and my mother sure meant that too, but that’s a story for another day!).

Now first we need to get something straight. A lot of people call me an ass – and technically they would be correct. You see, I am proud to be a member of that variety of the genre *Equus* (you know, horses) that are smaller in stature, and yes, have bigger ears too. But what we don’t have in the stature and beauty of our cousin the horse we sure make up for in our fully developed sense of style and personality! Most polite people refer to my species as a donkey – donkey -- that flows off the tongue a bit better than ass, doesn’t it?

Anyway, let me tell you my story. I was just one month old, a wee slip of a lad. There we were, my mother and me minding our own donkey business, when these men – complete strangers – come walking up to us and start looking us up and down like they owned us or something. My mother, God bless her, gave them one of her best donkey looks – the kind that says “Buzz off, mates, I’m tied to this wall, the sun is hot and the flies are driving me insane, you do the math” but it didn’t seem to stop the men from starting to untie her. I was afraid they were going to take only her – she was still my primary meal ticket you know – but then they reached for my lead too. Whatever was going to happen, I guessed, at least I was going along for the ride.

Our captors -- or were they our liberators? – they kept rehearsing their excuse if anyone so

much as looked at them the wrong way for stealing, I mean, for borrowing us. I know Mark and Matthew give differing accounts of it but the meaning is the same. My mom and me were required for the story by the way Matthew read his book of the prophets. You see, the high n' mighties (that's the way my mother talked) – the high n' mighties in Jerusalem were plotting against Jesus as if he was a king leading an invasion of their empire. O, my mother and me, we'd seen those "authorities" strutting by on their sleek horses and all dolled up in robes and jewels. Even their mounts wouldn't give us poor donkeys the time of day.

But you see, the high n' mighties had it all wrong! Zechariah had prophesied centuries before that the king – the Messiah – who would retake Jerusalem would be a poor lad, riding not a stallion but a humble donkey like me, or like my mom. The way Matthew read Zechariah, the prophesy called not just for a colt like me, but a momma donkey too. Just like my mother always said, "when the going gets tough, the tough go get their mothers." You know that's true about Jesus too, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Anyway, my mother and me we weren't crazy about anyone getting a free ride off of us – that's the donkey way, don't you know! But soon these men and women started putting their own cloaks on our backs. When it was time to mount up, at first it looked like Jesus was going to get on top of me, but then he saw my as yet spindly legs and he chose to ride my mother instead.

As we started down the road towards the big city, I couldn't believe it. My mother obviously liked the man Jesus, because she carried him as proudly as if she had been born in the royal stables herself. I fell into my usual lope along beside her, and every so often I felt Jesus rest his foot on my back.

I'll never forget the way the people stared at us. As we went along, people were doing the strangest thing – laying their cloaks on the road in front of us, taking palm leaves down from the trees to smooth out our path. I wondered if they could tell – we were donkeys – not a king's horses. The man we carried had no crown on his head, no jewels on his fingers. And besides, my mother wouldn't have taken kindly to anyone putting on airs while riding on her back, let me tell you.

Truth be told, Jesus looked a bit nervous as we moved into the city. People were calling him the son of King David – those were pretty high expectations for Jesus to live up to. It's sort of like a politician who has made all these promises to everyone along the campaign trail, and then has to live up to them. I couldn't imagine what Jesus must have been thinking during that long ride into Jerusalem. He was being received like royalty, and creating quite a stir. He heard his name being spread about the streets – Jesus, a prophet, from Nazareth, a Galilean. Matthew sure believed that Jesus was the new king. Old Zechariah's prophesy was being fulfilled by the man my mother carried on her back. Jerusalem was about to be liberated from its Roman captors, I thought. I figured my mother and me maybe would be liberated too after all this was over. In the end I was right, and wrong, all at the same time.

What do I mean? Well, Jesus rode us all the way to the gates of the temple. He was so kind to us as he dismounted, and made sure we were taken care of by the temple's stable keepers. I told my mother I wanted to stay with Jesus, but she told me, God bless her, that where Jesus was going was no place for a young colt like me. She said the people had misunderstood who

Jesus was – they wanted someone to liberate them from Roman oppression, *he* had come to liberate them all such that God's authority would be recognized not in the high n' mighties, but in **all** the people, even the asses too.

Jesus returned to fetch us at the end of that long day, and again he rode my mother back to Bethphage. The crowds were gone as we plodded out of the city, and Jesus seemed calm, but my mother told me she could feel some extra tension in his legs, a slight heaviness that she tried to bear as best her donkey's back could manage.

As we caught sight of our own little village, we knew that today was not to be the day of our liberation from our owner. But at the same time, we knew our lives would never be the same again.

We had carried a man whose heart was so big that our hearts had grown too. My mother, not known for her optimism, had begun to look at life a bit more hopefully. Even if the big city folk didn't see him yet as the one who could save them from themselves, no doubt they would. She trusted this on faith. Now I know it will come true, now that Matthew has written us both into his gospel! No offense to Mark, of course.

My mother has been gone now for many years, God bless her, but she never lost the hope she gained that day. I'm so old now that people call me ancient, but I'm glad I've lived long enough to see my story in print, even if we donkeys remain nameless. My name is Buddy – I gave myself that name because Jesus is my buddy. My mother always said "if Jesus didn't mind having asses for his buddies, then he was okay in her books." Coming from my mother, that is saying a lot. Amen.