

Sermon for Sunday – April 2 – Palm Sunday
Matthew 21:1-11

Skit Guys – the disciples and the donkey (5 min)

John the Baptist said: “A voice cries out, in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

Prepare the way... of the Lord? How are we supposed to prepare the way of the Lord? Aren't we all supposed to follow Jesus, not precede him?

Given the choice I would much rather have Jesus stepping out in front of me, leading the safari, not sending me ahead to prepare the way, to hack away at the vegetation with my little machete.

I'm partial to the God of Psalm 23. The Lord “leads me beside still waters.” Yes, Jesus leads me... sounds so much better. Or perhaps you prefer that old “footprints” poem in which Jesus carries us during the hard times. Yes. That works splendidly for me as well. But whenever I hear, “Prepare the way of the Lord” I am reminded that sometimes - Jesus does not just lead us, or carry us but sometimes Jesus sends us ahead, calling us to journey into new places and to do unexpected things.

Today's story is just that kind of story. It's easy to miss —what with the donkey and the colt and the cloaks and the hoopla and the palm branches and the shouts of Hosanna and the turmoil in the streets of Jerusalem. This is Jesus' parade, of course, and he is the center of it all—the recipient of all that attention and pomp, the king, the prophet Jesus of Nazareth.

Let us consider the beginning of the story – the start of the whole day. Jesus sends his disciples to a nearby village to retrieve a donkey and a

colt. **But** not to a village they've already been, not to a village where Jesus had just visited and where the memory of him is fresh in their minds.

No, Jesus says, "Go into the village ahead of you. "Go to that place you haven't been, go to that place I haven't taken you yet, go to that place that's still up the road away. "There will be a donkey and colt there, and if anyone says anything just tell them, 'The Lord needs them.'"

Now, we know that the disciples did what they were told; they let Jesus send them on ahead with these very cryptic instructions. But I have to wonder if they protested a little bit – just like our drama suggested. They didn't know what they would encounter there. Would there be dangers on the road? They are very close to Jerusalem—hostilities are starting to build and it won't be long before they boil over. It's not hard to imagine them putting up a bit of a fight... Do we have to go to that village up ahead? Why don't we go back to that village we just left? They know us there. I think I saw a donkey and a colt at old Eli's house. We don't know what we'll find in this village up ahead. It's unknown territory. Maybe they will be hostile toward us. ---- Y'know what, Jesus? Why don't you go on ahead and we'll tag along behind. You will make a much more convincing argument than us anyway.

You see, it takes faith to **follow** Jesus. And we are called to do that. But it takes a courageous faith to **go ahead** of Jesus, into the unknown. It takes a sturdy faith to walk down a road, your feet have never walked before. It takes bold faith to look back over your shoulder and see Jesus, smiling and saying, "Yes, go on. I'll be right here when you get back."

The crowds making their way into Jerusalem where an interesting lot. Some followed Jesus, shouting their Hosannas. But it's not the crowd in Jesus' rear-view mirror, following at a comfortable distance, that gives this particular Sunday its name, "Palm Sunday". It was the crowd that went ahead of him. The crowd that cut palm branches and put them on the road, that spread its cloaks on the road—that was the crowd that prepared the way for Jesus.

These crowds ahead of him—they just couldn't help themselves. They couldn't help bursting into Jerusalem, that busy and bustling city, and sending the city into a messy uproar. "He's coming! He's coming! Jesus, the prophet has arrived. Blessed is the one who comes."

Are there places in our lives in which we're respectfully following Jesus? Thank God for that kind of following. But could it be that maybe, just maybe, Jesus has stopped leading for a moment and is just standing with you where you are, and maybe he's just pointing. Just pointing, to that village up the road, the village where something risky resides.

Who knows what you'll find there?

Who knows what we will find there?

But I'm pretty sure that we will find something new and life-giving.

Perhaps if we go out ahead - we will find what we found years ago as McClure Church did when we let go of building a traditional church and instead decided to build a ministry which was about enriched, supportive and affordable housing for Older Adults.

Perhaps if we go out ahead – we will look at new ways to worship like Carlyle and Radville have and thus opening themselves up to continue to be the church in their communities.

We are challenged this Palm Sunday to consider where Jesus is sending us now as churches?

We are challenged this Palm Sunday to consider where Jesus is sending us now as individuals?

We are challenged to go ahead into an unknown spaces. Putting cloaks on the road and making a place for the one who said, “That which you do for the least of these, you do to me.” Yes, it takes faith to follow Jesus. But it takes Palm Sunday faith to go ahead into the unfamiliar.

It takes Palm Sunday faith to go ahead of Jesus, knowing that the road leads us through the events of Holy Week... for we know that going into the unknown doesn't always mean fun and adventure. Faith is a risk, and nowhere do we feel that more acutely than in the events of Holy Week.

But let us not shy away from faith, for there is nowhere that Jesus sends us that he is not willing to go himself.

So let us be bold for we are sent ahead to make way for Jesus.

May we have the courage to go ahead.

Amen