

Donkeys, the vehicle of God's upside-down Kingdom

What is all this about a donkey?

Here in the Palm Sunday story, full of majesty and glory, there is a long story about a short horse. This is an incident worthy of notice. Nothing in the Gospel does not belong, even when it feels like it shouldn't.

Jesus tells some disciples, un-named ones, to go and find a donkey. He gives them directions and details, and even a password to get it free.

Today, the equivalent would be going to Markham to drive away a car sitting outside a dealership. I would wonder why Jesus asked Me/Us to do it. I would wish I had been given a more prestigious job. And I would sulk on the bus to Markham because we were probably missing out on something more interesting.

It is all improbable and odd, and it is not even the main part of the story.

The main part is Jesus arriving in triumph at the great city, to the clamour of the crowds and to songs of praise.

But back to the lads lifting a car.

What vehicle does Jesus chose? Surely a Limo! Surely a motorcade! Surely a Pope-mobile! No. He chooses a compact car, a Smart car or a baby Fiat. It is not glorious or dazzling. It is small and without distinction. It is, like a donkey, a poor person's vehicle.

Jesus does this to turn upside-down our understanding of power and might. The carpenter's son, while the Lord of eternal Glory, is still the carpenter's son.

So why the story about the guys who have to get the donkey?

I am sure that just before going to Jerusalem everyone knew that something big was about to happen. These nameless disciples never got to do the cool stuff like Peter, James and John. Jesus must have come up and said to them, "Lads, I have an important job for you to do!"

Have you ever felt that Jesus had an important job for you to do?

Most of us would probably say, No. Rarely do we feel compelled by the Spirit to go and proclaim the Gospel in darkest Milton. Few are the times when we are called on to heal the sick or raise the dead. Most of us feel God is calling us to live out our lives, the ordinary ones we live. With faithfulness, integrity and love. I would love to be singled out for a spiritual "Mission Impossible", with all the greatness implied in that. But that is *me* wanting glory, wanting to be the top person, wanting to be the most valued player. I want to win Olympic gold for Jesus. What Jesus repeatedly invites us into is the upside-down kingdom of heaven.

The donkey story matters. Three of the four Gospels record it. It matters in two important ways.

1. Holiness is made up not of dramatic feats of spiritual gymnastics, but of folding laundry, weekly pay-slips, washed dishes, cooked meals, visits to the old person nearby. It is made up of dealing with people you may not be drawn to with more love than you perhaps feel you have. It is made up of checking in with God each day, even if that doesn't look like prayer. It is polishing brass for the altar, speaking to a beggar, being in touch with family, it is being a good person and trusting that God loves you without hesitation.

2. Sometimes you have to do stuff that doesn't make sense. There are times when it feels like God is pushing you somewhere, to do something, opening your heart and mind to changes. You cannot see where this will lead you. And you may not be able to see why it will work, but it is being asked of you. Jesus doesn't say "Go into yonder village.." but, once or twice in a lifetime you feels Jesus tugging at your sleeve. Like the lads looking for a donkey you might find yourself thinking, Why me? Why is this so hard? Here I am O Lord, send someone else! I cannot do this!

So on Palm Sunday, when we should be in a great parade of glory, shouting praises for our King, the Upside-down Gospel deflects our attention aside to what being faithful to the upside-down King means. It means a thousand small things. It is in the un-magnificent daily round that we worship the Lord in the beauty of real holiness. It is in the mundane changing of diapers, cleaning of bathrooms, turning up to work on time that we his glory proclaim. It is with gold of obedience and with the incense of happy lowliness that we bow down before him.

Let God's leading be both to the unglamorous, and to the unknown things in life. Do not reckon up their wonderful-ness, but reckon up your faithfulness. The un-named disciples task is listed here not least because they went off on a wild goose chase and brought back the goose requested. We wiil also be unnamed disciples and we will be glorified in heaven because of the unsung deeds of quiet heroism, faith and stick-with-it-ness with which we have been faithful to doing what God has put before us.

In that spirit of faithfulness I urge you to walk with Jesus the way of the Cross this week. Come to the Holy Week services. Follow Jesus into what seems foolishness, weakness and failure. Walk with him into suffering and despair. There is within it the promise of Glory, and donkeys too.