



**"The Lord Needs It"**  
**Rev. Dr. Scott Field**  
**Mark 11: 1-11**  
**April 28, 2019**  
**9:15 AM Service**

## **Easter Egg Anxiety**

It's the Sunday after Easter.

Sometimes it is called "Low Sunday".

There is probably a legitimate theological or liturgical reason for this name, but for me it is usually because after the full house worship attendance on Easter Sunday, the next week, apparently, we are spiritually spent or simply can't take the high-voltage worship two weeks in a row -- so there are notably fewer people in worship than even a "normal" Sunday.

For those of you here this morning, THANK YOU. It gets quite lonely in the sanctuary when we're just a faithful few.

And speaking of Easter, I noticed this riveting account in the *Naperville Sun* from last week.

*Despite 14,000 plastic eggs spread across the grass on four different fields at Frontier Sports Complex for the Naperville Jaycees Egg Hunt Saturday morning, some young children ended up with no eggs and a lot of tears after the mad dash to scoop up the candy-filled treasures.*

Actually tears, frustration, and empty baskets are not really unusual at Easter Egg Hunts. But not to worry, because the Jaycees, who organize the event and gather sponsors, we're prepared with a new inclusion initiative.

*Luckily, the Jaycees planned ahead for this inevitable situation, and as soon as the last egg had been grabbed, several volunteers walked around with pockets full of plastic, candy-filled eggs to hand out to the disappointed kids holding empty baskets. "In one minute, all the eggs were gone," said Jaycees senior member Greg Siegel, who scanned the fields filled with hundreds of kids to find the sad-eyed, empty-handed ones.*

Inclusion becomes bigger part of Naperville Jaycees Egg Hunt <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/naperville-sun/news/ct-nvs-jaycees-easter-egg-hunt-naperville-st-0421-story.html>

I've checked this out with several parents who are closer to the action than Lynda and I are at this point; it seems frustration and crying are a regular part of egg hunts. I want to suggest that this is because Easter Egg Hunts, despite our expectations of happy children, are actually early exercises in how we train our children from the earliest age to get. I think after the first experience of an empty basket; kids get the drill. Run faster. Don't wear fluffy bunny costumes -- you get tangled up. No bulky baskets and a bunch of decorations. Go plain, simple, and fast. You'll get more eggs or at least, and this is likely a more important metric, more eggs than other kids nearby whose baskets you'll be surveying.

It's another of our early experiences of the anxiety of never having enough. As we get older, this whole egg thing expands into getting enough eggs so that we will not have all of them in one basket, and, especially, gathering and growing a so-called comfortable nest-egg.

And nest eggs lead me to talk today about our relationship with money, with devotion to Jesus, and our partnership in the healing of the world in Jesus' name.

All of which brings us, predictably, to the donkey.

### **The Donkey in Bethany: The Lord Needs Us and Our Stuff**

When we celebrate Palm Sunday, the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, we usually focus on the palms. I am always reminded of a Palm Sunday worship service at First Congregational Church in Naperville. The worship planning people thought it would be a good idea to have an actual donkey come into the back of the sanctuary and down the center aisle carrying the man who would play the role of Jesus in the re-enactment of the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, just four days away.

The choir was singing fortissimo, the organist had pulled out all the stops (*"All Glory, Laud, and Honor, to Thee Redeemer King"*), the congregation waving palms, and coming through the side door at the back of the sanctuary the procession began -- pastors, a few children, the men who would play the disciples at the Holy Thursday re-enactment of the Last Supper, and then -- the real surprise for Congregationalists who had been part of a lot of Palm Sunday services through the years but had never seen anything like this -- a real, live donkey with "Jesus" on board. No doubt in anybody's mind, this would be the kind of liturgical experience adults would recall for their children and grandchildren. The excitement was electric!

When some of the pastors met up the day after for our Monday Morning Recovery Coffee -- where a half-dozen of us would get together to recap events in our congregations on Sunday the day before, trade contact information on difficult church members, and kvetch about the creeping intrusion of the Park District scheduling soccer games on the sacred turf of Sunday morning, Keith, the pastor of First Congregational, told us about the Palm Sunday processional with the live donkey. Though the planning for this live action procession was impressive, the leaders had apparently not included the building committee who constructed the church building 60 years earlier. They build the sanctuary according to a popular design of that time called the Akron Plan. The building committee apparently never considered the possibility that donkey would be part of a processional in the sanctuary. And the Palm Sunday planners, apparently, were unaware that donkeys don't like going down a sloped hardwood aisle. More than not liking it, this particular donkey refused, brayed loudly, and clambered wildly until both Jesus and the donkey disappeared out the back to the sanctuary and into the church parking lot. As Keith told it, the effect started as anticipation, degenerated into corporate anxiety, and ended with hilarity as if a Ringling Brothers clown showed up in church that day.

Sometimes it's hard for us to connect with the impact of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey as described in the Bible. Let me give it a go.

Why was Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem -- and where did he get it? Throughout the gospels, Jesus and the disciples walked. What's the deal with the donkey?

The Israelites in Jerusalem had been praying for over a hundred years - deliver us! They lived under the boot of the Roman Emperor. They had no king of their own because the enemy Roman army who occupied their country would not let them have a king. "God, your ancient prophet said a new king would come and free his people." It says, for example, in Zechariah 14:4 that the deliverer would stand on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem and that's where he would appear from. And then it says, in Zechariah 9:9, that he would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey, "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

So when Jesus, this prophet from up north, starts this two-mile inauguration day parade down into the heart of Jerusalem, he comes riding down from where? The Mount of Olives. He comes riding on what? A donkey!; exactly the same beast that Solomon rode when Solomon became king. So nobody misses that this is the moment. Even the Romans clearly get the idea that Jesus is flashing the kingship sign, and five days later they kill him.

Now, how does Jesus get a donkey to ride? While we focus on the palms (just one verse -- verse 8), the donkey gets five verses. The donkey is a big deal. Where did Jesus get it?

Jesus sent out two of his disciples. He pulled them aside and gives them instruction, "Go to the village ahead of you and just as you enter it you will find a colt tied up there which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here."

Now, if I were one of those two disciples I would be like, "They are going to beat me up!" Donkeys to people then were as valuable as cars are to us now. It's like, "Where are you going with my car?" And "never ridden" means like what it would mean to us to have a brand-new car. In fact, since this is going to be like an Inauguration Parade for King Jesus, it's like a brand-new Escalade. You're like, I just got it home from the dealer; nobody is taking this car!

If anybody says, "What are you doing?", just say, "The Lord needs it." And that is the key the unlocks an opportunity.

The Lord needs it?

Well, it's not like the Lord doesn't have any idea where to get a donkey. God created the heavens and the earth. God owns the cattle on a thousand hillsides - as well as the horses, donkey, birds, and rodents. The trees of the fields clap their hands in praise to God. It's not as if Jesus was saying, "I've heard there is this thing called a donkey and I'd sure like to have one. Anybody know where a person could get themselves a donkey?"

But Jesus did indeed need a donkey to get the message to the people that the One they had been longing for, the true Lord of the Universe and Hope of the world anticipated by the Hebrew prophets, had arrived and his name was and is Jesus.

And that donkey-owner made it possible for Jesus to embody the message that the Messiah had arrived. Clearly, he was aware in some way that when the word came that the Lord needed the donkey, he would gladly release the donkey without question. He could have kept it for himself and all his neighbors would have understood.

When the thousands were gathered on the hillside listening to Jesus teaching and needed something to eat, the young boy releases the simple resources of the loaves and salted fish his mother had prepared for *his* lunch so that, in the hands of Jesus, thousands were fed. He could have kept the lunch for himself -- after all, people should be prepared for things like this and if you don't have a lunch you'll learn better next time.

Or just one other example: Moses wasn't sure that God would use him to free the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. Seriously, who was he to take on something like this? What did God say? Moses, what do you have in your hand? "A shepherd's staff - but a lot of good that will do against Pharaoh". "Release it. Throw it on the ground." God turned it into a snake! This sounds wild to us, but it was a demonstration that God's power was at work

through Moses. And you can easily believe that Moses gained a lot of confidence in God's power. The Egyptian Pharaoh might need to be convinced that Moses was coming in the name and under the authority of the God of All Creation, but before the Pharaoh was convinced, Moses himself needed the certainty that he could be used to extend God's work. And that certainty began with releasing what was in his hand.

God has tied the future of the Jesus Mission to the partnership with people who release to the Lord the things needed for the blessing of others. We are being transformed from the people who always worry about getting to those who are concerned with serving, with giving, with healing, with feeding, with supporting, comforting, helping, reconciling, making peace, and doing justice. And, after the tragic events of the past ten days in Crystal Lake, and the unfathomable cruelty with which AJ was treated by those who were supposed to love and care for him, we are also committed to care for and stand up for the voiceless and powerless who so easily, it seems, escape our notice.

What do we do with the "stuff" we have, the opportunities before us, the relationships in which we find ourselves, and the resources we control? We can hold on to it -- continuing the game of getting and keeping. We can also share a portion of our time and attention, our abilities and our money in partnership with God for the expansion and development of the Jesus Mission here and elsewhere.

This is a critical decision point for each of us. It's a fork in the road.

You see, not only does the Lord need our money, but our money needs the Lord.

I have often observed that money is an amazing gift, but it is a lousy god. Jesus said we must make a choice between God and Money. You can't give your devotion to both. One must serve the other. In our culture, our money is relentlessly attempting to overthrow the Lord Jesus with false promises of security, peace, and happiness.

In his book *Every Good Endeavor*, Pastor Tim Keller provides the following helpful illustration:

At twenty-seven years old, Howard was given an opportunity to move from one large company to another for a modest increase in responsibility, but greater future opportunity. At the point of salary negotiations, Howard was asked to share his current salary with his prospective employer. Howard pumped up the figure by a mere four percent, a few thousand dollars. Of course, his thinking was that the higher they thought his salary was currently, the more they'd offer him. He justified the lie because the prospective company offered two weeks less vacation a year than his current one. He just added the value of that benefit onto his salary figure. On the very slim chance that he'd get caught, he had a plausible excuse. The benefit outweighed the cost and risk. And by the way, he was pretty sure everyone did this sort of thing. So was there anything wrong with it?

So, what about Howard? How could his small lie possibly have wider effects on society? As Howard tells the story now, he shares that a real breakthrough in his thinking happened when he realized that the desire for just a little more money would so easily cause him to forsake his integrity. Why couldn't he just have been honest and shared that he thought the two weeks' vacation he'd be sacrificing was worth an additional few thousand dollars? Why couldn't he just trust that God, who was providing the interview in the first place, would provide for the salary? And was he basing his interest in the job on the salary or on the work God was giving him to do? He realized that the wider impact on society started with the recognition that, with integrity sacrificed on the altar of money, the next lie would be easier. He realized that others who might observe him could be tempted to do the same. Everyone would trust one another a little less. And he realized that to work for the money instead of the value that the work itself might contribute would damage the culture of the company he was joining.  
*(Every Good Endeavor, Dutton, 2012, pp. 200-203)*

Ready to Release

Jesus is very clear: either we will train our money or our money will train us.  
 There is no middle ground here.

We are preparing for a special offering next Sunday. It will not be an offering of money. It will be an offering of our commitment to release financial resources to the Lord for the work of the Jesus Mission.

What does that look like in practical terms?

Begin to engage in some wrestling prayer:

Lord, you know my bills, my obligations, my fears, and desires. I've been trained to believe that I need more money, need all the money I control, and must hold on to it all. Pry my fingers from the resources you have provided so I can release them as a partner in your mission.

Get serious because money is serious:

The basic Christian practice regarding money is pre-meditated, proportionate giving. IT is about giving from the first and finest we have, not the leftovers. It is about giving a proportion of what God has provided for us in order to bless others. And it is a regular practice rather than an emotional impulse or fundraising appeal. It doesn't take winning the lottery or having a windfall bonus of some sort. It always starts with what you already have: a donkey, loaves and fish, a shepherd's staff.

Come ready to release. We will use an Estimate of Giving Card. You will receive it in the mail this week and can use it to indicate the financial resources you are releasing for the ministry of Christ through this congregation starting July 1 through June 30 of 2020.

The Lord needs it.

And your resources need the Lord, too.

