

**Date: Sunday March 28, 2010**

**Scripture: Luke 19:28-40**

**Title: "Preparation and Direction"**

**The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): Jesus gives specific directions for his disciples to follow. As the church we are called to follow Christ's instruction as well.**

**The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): As the church, we can make a good difference in the world.**

**(Remember, it's all about God!)**

I read this week about a man who went to church for the very first time in his life. Fortunately, he had a friend that went with him. As soon as they sat down in the sanctuary, the first time attendee began asking all sorts of questions. The friend that went along did the best she could to answer his questions. The first timer asked about the stained glass windows. The friend replied with a brief history. The first timer asked about the reading of the scriptures, the friend replied about how there would be a reading from different parts of the Bible. When the pastor was preaching, and paused to look at his watch, the first timer asked about that. The friend replied, "That doesn't mean a thing!" For what it's worth, I don't wear a watch. I have heard it said a pastor can condense into fifteen minutes what most people say in three minutes.

I share that story because there is so much to preach about on Palm Sunday. We can be talking about the procession of palms, the passion story, and for us, today, we can be talking about the blessing of Confirmation Sunday. Right there we

have the making of three different sermons. So it could be your lucky day; a three sermon Sunday for the price of one.

Just kidding. Today, though, I do want to talk about preparation and direction. In this morning's passage from Luke, Jesus is detailed as he provides direction to the disciples. He said to his disciples, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it,' you shall say this, 'The Lord has need of it'" (Luke 19.28-31, NRSV).

"The Lord has need of it." Think about it! Jesus' Palm Sunday plan depended on a *donkey*. Let's take a moment to consider what that might mean. In the Ancient Near East, a donkey was the most common—and most basic—form of transportation. Today we might equate this to an old stripped-down, two-door, four on the floor, AM radio, no air conditioning, Ford Pinto.

The donkey, like the Ford Pinto, is a curious creature (I can remember when I wanted a Pinto). Its back is only three feet off the ground - very low. And while it's strong enough to carry a full-grown man, if he's tall, his feet will drag in the dirt. The donkey can be singularly stubborn. I remember some Pintos that didn't run. The Harper's Encyclopedia of Bible Life puts it like this, "(The donkey) does require the frequent application of a light stick...on the rump if a good day's journey is to be (attained)..." (Harper and Row, page 129). I remember some Pintos that took extra attention to get going (Gondola).

Now the donkey, with its enormous ears, long narrow nose, and stumpy legs, looks rather foolish. But it's also economical, which is why poor farmers used it to plow. For the diminutive donkey eats only about one-quarter as much as a horse. And it's hardworking, too.

Furthermore, the donkey is a peaceful creature. Alex Gondola writes that kings and warriors rode on horseback. Horses were a symbol of war. But farmers and families rode donkeys. Donkeys were a symbol of peace. So, if someone calls you a "donkey," or its equivalent, maybe it's not *such* an insult, for a donkey is hardworking, economical and peaceful.

Still, isn't it remarkable that Jesus, the Son of God, Immanuel, which means God with us, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end, The Bread of Life, The Light of the World, our Good Shepherd, our Redeemer and King; Jesus, The Way, the Truth and the Life, the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace; Jesus, the most influential human being who ever lived, on his day of great triumph, had to borrow a burro! He depended on a donkey! Just imagine how much more, in God's great plan, that if God can use a donkey, God might have need of you and me (Gondola).

Sometimes, I have to admit, there's a bit of donkey in me. Like the donkey, I too can be stubborn – I actually prefer the word steadfast. Like the donkey, I, too, can need a slap on the backside to get going.

Now I see many of you nodding your head and agreeing, please don't hurt

yourself. I can almost hear you saying, “That’s right pastor, you can be like a jack – oops, I mean donkey.” Well, I have a pretty good hunch that all of us, at times, can be a bit like a donkey. And that’s OK for one of the great affirmations of the Bible, one of the great wonders and mysteries of our faith is not only that we believe in God, but that *God* believes in *us*! No cathedral can be built, no anthem of praise lifted up, no rain forest saved, no poor person comforted, no child fed, no prayer prayed, no Sunday School class taught, no injustice corrected unless you and I, working with God, do it (Gondola)! Like the donkey, the Lord has need of you and the Lord has need of me and together, we are the church.

There’s a story about Jesus entering heaven after his Ascension. An angel asks him, “Who have you left to carry on your work?” Jesus answers, “Just a little band of men and women who love me.”

“But what if they fail when trials come,” asks the angel, “Will everything you have done be defeated?” “Yes,” said Jesus, “if they fail all I have done on earth will be lost.”

“And there’s nothing more than these feeble, imperfect women and men?” “No,” said Jesus, “there’s nothing more.” “What then,” asks the angel? Jesus replied, “They will not fail” (C. F. Andrews, quoted by Charles L. Allen in God’s Psychiatry, Spire Books, pp. 125-126 [Gondola]). *That’s* how much God trusts in, and has entrusted, to us.

On this Palm Sunday and Confirmation Sunday, how appropriate that we

recall the direction that Jesus offered his disciples and how the disciples followed his every word as they prepared for the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. On this Palm Sunday how important it is that we remember the role of a common donkey in the ministry of Christ. On this Confirmation Sunday, how appropriate we lift up that as the church we are called to follow the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. In fact, on this Sunday how good it is to know that we are called to be the body of Christ. You see, any organization can reach out with care and compassion, and many do; any company can do good works in the community, and many do; but only one institution is called by God to be the body of Christ on earth and that is the church of which we all, including you five people, are a part.

I share these words from the book *Affirming Faith* that the confirmation students have been working with these past months. “The church has many ministries carried out by its members. Three essential ministries are: a ministry of worship, a ministry of teaching and learning, and a ministry of service . . . God gives us gifts and we are called to use these gifts to build up the body of Christ (the church) and the world. Believing and following Jesus Christ includes striving to minister not only within the Christian community, but the world as well. Through worship, teaching and service, we may all begin to discover that our lives are part of a larger whole related to a source of power beyond ourselves.” Through the church and through our ministries, we will gain a better understanding of God and God’s call to us. Through the church, we are better able to witness to God’s love more fully (Affirming Faith).

There aren't always many cheers for the church. That's OK. No one cheered for the donkey on that Sunday of Palms so long ago, but the Lord still had need of him. No one cheered for the donkey that day so long ago, but they cheered for our Savior, who was riding toward the cross and riding toward the Resurrection of Easter morning. We celebrate that resurrection next Sunday morning, and we celebrate it every Sunday morning. We celebrate that resurrection whenever we live out our call as the church preparing to and following the directions of our Lord.

Today, as Immanuel United Church of Christ, our ability to live out that call is strengthened because of Kylie, Austin, Paige, Drake, and Megan answering that call. So when someone might ask, like that first time visitor or even a long time attendee, what does confirmation mean, we can reply with the confidence of good news, that confirmation means all the difference, all the good difference, in the world. Thanks be to God. Let us pray.

Dear Lord,

We thank you for these young people and all your children who are following your preparation and direction. When we come together with willingness, effort, and determination, as the church, to be about you in the world, then the world is a better place and your good news lives on even in the midst of challenges and difficulties. So we pray this day in your name, Amen.

Offering: Let's make our offering today in honor of our confirmation students. The ushers will please . . .

Dedication: Lord, accept and bless this that we give. Call us to use these gifts as you know are needed. We are willing. So we pray, Amen.

Benediction: From this point on, forward through the ages, move the faithful spirits, following the call of the divine. We are blessed by the same, go forth. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

*Affirming Faith*; United Church of Christ Press: Cleveland, OH; 1996.

Gondola, Alex; *Lectionary Homiletics*; [www.goodpreacher.com](http://www.goodpreacher.com); 2010.

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.