

UNTIE ME!
Palm-Passion Sunday, April 10, 2022
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Several weeks ago, I started watching a Smithsonian documentary titled “The *Real* Jesus of Nazareth.” It starred Robert Powell, the actor who played the critically acclaimed role of Jesus in the epic 1977 mini-series “Jesus of Nazareth.” In the documentary, Powell travels to the actual holy sites portrayed in movie. Sprinkled throughout were historians, archeologists and theologians providing commentary. Once such historian claimed that Palm Sunday never happened, least not the way portrayed in the Gospels. “The Romans would have never tolerated such a ruckus crowd,” he said. “Jesus would have been arrested on the spot lest he sparks an uprising.” His *opinion* encouraged me to dig deep into Palm Sunday for today’s message.

We could talk about Jesus fulfilling the ancient prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9: “...Behold, your king is coming to you, righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey.” The coming

messiah must fulfill all of the ancient prophecies so that the new covenant can be established.

We could talk about the symbology of the palm fronds and cloaks begin laid on the ground before Jesus. In Jewish culture and used during feasts, the palm is a symbol of victory, triumph, peace and eternal life. The spreading of garments, cloaks and prayer shawls upon the road was an act of honor, a declaration that Jesus was the King of Kings, the promised Messiah, worthy to be elevated from the ground.

We could explore the crowd... the multitude signing and shouting “Hosanna! Hosanna in the Highest! Blessed is the King!” In five short days, this same crowd will be screaming “Crucify him!”

Then there is the donkey... donkeys are mentioned in scripture over 90 times. Oh, there are some “famous” ones like the talking donkey in Numbers (it’s really God), tradition tells us about the donkey that Mary rode to Bethlehem then into Egypt, and there is donkey in St. Luke’s Gospel today. Donkeys were gentle symbols of peace and trust unlike the horse which conveys power, might and strength. I kept

coming back to donkey Luke writes about... and two words kept jumping out at me: “tied” and “untie.” One of the beautiful things about scripture is finding little gems, little whispers of wisdom that the Holy Spirit plants throughout the gospels. From Luke, I looked at St. Matthew and St. Mark, and there it was again... “tied” and “untie.” The donkey wasn’t in a stall or pasture free to roam, play, nibble on grass or have a cool drink. He was tied up to a hitching post or a fence beam unable to move, unable to really do much of anything.

And, I thought, “What am I tied to?” How about you? Maybe we’re tied to a job we dislike, to social media, to porn, or to an addiction of some sort. Perhaps we find ourselves tied down by guilt, anxiety, shame or the inability to forgive someone. Maybe we are tied to unhealthy relationships, selfish attitudes, materialism or a doubts about our faith. Like the donkey, we may feel trapped unable to do anything more than pull, tug on the rope that is keeping us tied to the post.

Of course, this is where Jesus comes into the picture... he unties us! He sets us free! Through the cross and his resurrection, Jesus frees us from our fears, instilling in us a boldness to show love, peace, faith and joy... to be his witness to a broken world. We cannot fully commit to God when we are tied. We must surrender our burdens and weights to Jesus much like the owner who freely surrendered the donkey to the two disciples.

Rev. Tim McConnell shares with us, “Palm Sunday is not just a celebration of Christ as King but a celebration of Jesus as our liberator from dependencies and afflictions – a celebration of Jesus as Lord of every aspect of lives. We need to be free, untied to experience Jesus. We are meant to ride with him... to follow Jesus on his journey into the **very presence** of God!” Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!