

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "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?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'" So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

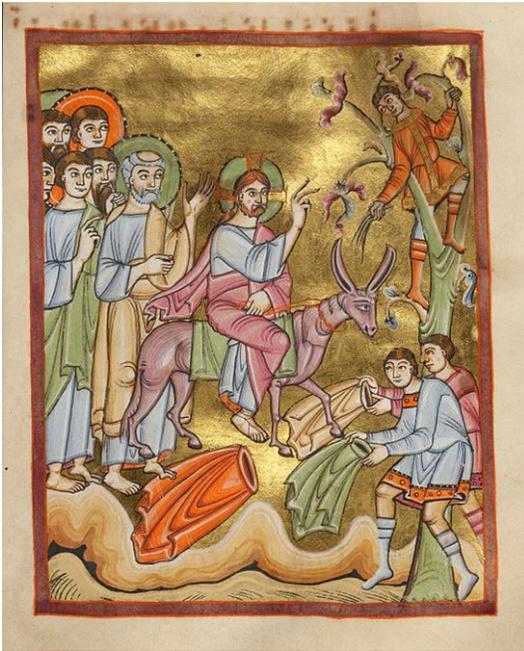
They said, "The Lord needs it." Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!"

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out."

They say that life is all about the details - phones that keep ringing, e-mail and texts that have to be answered, computers that crash, copy machines that jam, and children who are



sick when we need to be at work. We struggle with the details of our bodies that don't work as they should, with doctors, specialists, medical tests and pills. Our children juggle homework, athletics, orthodontists and piano lessons.

Then we go to church on Sunday, and what do we find but more details? Our worship is filled with hymns and prayers, sacraments and readings, stuff we have memorized and stuff we confess. The word "liturgy" actually means "the work of the people," and our liturgy can sometimes feel like a lot of work, a 'to-do' list to make our way through, step by step, detail

by detail.

Yet, just as it is with the rest of life, these details are important. From them we find far more meaning than we would have, just going through the motions.

You can see the detail with which Luke describes Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. We are

given the exact location: the Jerusalem outskirts of Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives. Jesus purposefully pulls two of his disciples aside. "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."

Jesus has clearly spent time preparing for this day. He knows exactly what type of colt he wants, one that had never been ridden. He knows exactly where the colt is. He's even worked out a response to the public relations problem of swiping a colt. "If anyone asks you ... just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'"

Why is Jesus so detail oriented? Why doesn't he just ask his disciples to find him whatever ride into town they can? Because Jesus knows he's fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy of the long-awaited Messiah. "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant, victorious, humble, riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

Because this is more than a protest march, Jesus is determined to get his arrival into town exactly right.

The signs, the shouts, all the details point to more than meets the eye. And Luke is determined that we know every detail of the arrival of our new king.

It's important to pay attention to the details, because when we do, we see things we would otherwise miss; details that can transform our understanding and change the way we both look at and live our lives. Yes, details can be that important!

So we all had a snow day on Wednesday, didn't we? And I took a little time to do some cleaning up of my closets at home; something I rarely do. I went through some old gift bags I use for saving Christmas cards & ornaments. On top of the pile was a striking blue card showing the night sky over Bethlehem, ablaze with stars and angels. Inside were familiar words from Luke: "Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth! Good will to all people!"

Surprised by these words, now late in this season of Lent, I realized a connection that I've never noticed before. Today, on Palm Sunday, the crowds in Jerusalem proclaim a strikingly similar song of the angels, "Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven." Did you ever hear that detail before? There's a connection made from beginning to end, of what Jesus was doing in the world at his birth and what his disciples recognized to be true at his arrival in Jerusalem.

“Peace, glory and good will to all...” If this is to be more than a passing phrase of fleeting good intentions, it needs to be heard not just as a sentiment but as a command, words that call for not just a happy mood but steady, faithful obedience.

This is why Luke shares the detail that a long-forgotten Christmas card fell across the path of Jesus as he rode down from the Mount of Olives. "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" So shouted the disciples.

Luke wants us to know that these words we so happily send to each other at Christmas come with a Good Friday price. The words sung at Jesus' birth are now marking his path to the cross. The detail of connecting these dots is important.

The angels' proclamation of "Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth! Good will to all people!" was not so much a birth announcement but a set of marching orders to which Jesus was obedient throughout his life.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, he did so as a king, but he carried himself not so much royal prestige and power but rather with humble obedience and service. Hmmm; a good role model, wasn't he? In obedience, Jesus set his face to Jerusalem, knowing that what awaited him at the conclusion of his journey was a violent end.

In obedience he traveled along the way, remaining faithful to every detail of God's desire for him to be faithful to his call, to reconcile the rejected and the lost. Then he entered the city to make peace with the challenge of offering his own life. It was not easy, as our services later this week, on Thursday and Friday, will attest. But the detail of Jesus actions show us how we are to live.

To live a Christian life is to model, as best we can, the pattern of Jesus' obedience; to allow "Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth! Good will to all people!" to become a drumbeat pacing our steps along our life's journey.

For Jesus, obedience meant far more than a parade on Sunday. For us, it means a thousand details and daily to-do lists in the complexities and demands of our many relationships.

That is surely one of the reasons we are given the otherwise inconsequential account of the disciples being sent to fetch a colt for this Palm Sunday parade. Strange, isn't it, how in the midst of the great, suspenseful drama of the entry into Jerusalem, Luke devotes attention to the detail about this rather peripheral matter of Jesus' transportation? But maybe it's not so strange, after all.

Buried in the detail is the message that the story of the disciples' **small** obedience is performed under the umbrella of Jesus' **great** obedience.

In securing the colt, paying attention to the necessary detail, they do as they are told, and in so doing their small and seemingly insignificant deeds are woven into God's greater story of the redemption of all humanity.

When Jesus sat on that young colt and began to ride into Jerusalem, some of the people around him were wise enough to recognize the moment of their salvation. They cut branches down and spread them, along with their cloaks, on the ground in front of him.

They shouted those words again; "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in highest heaven." They paid attention to the details of announcing a savior. Few of them knew what that meant for the days to come, what would take place, and what would be asked of them.

We know the details of Palm Sunday, the Last Supper, Good Friday and Easter. We go through them year after year. So, why do this all over again? For the same reason that we go through the details every Sunday.

Palm Sunday is part of our faithful training of being disciples. It is part of our life long walk with Jesus, part of our maintaining hope, step by step, in this journey of life together.

Maintaining hope and sustaining faithfulness is largely a matter of obedience, attending to the necessary details of what we are called to do. As the Biblical scholar and author Eugene Peterson writes: "People who strive, humbly and without pride, to meet the responsibilities they encounter in their personal, everyday lives will, sooner or later, in ways seen and unseen, surely encounter Christ."

There is something about the simple drama and humble pageantry of Palm Sunday that speaks to us in a basic, primal way that translates into our daily lives.

On one level, everyone loves a parade, just to be a spectator.

On another level, we can all relate to the detail of what is asked and what is then done; the checklist of the duties assigned and the faithfulness with which everything is carried out. Hopefully we can translate into our lives and in the life of this congregation together just what is required of us as faithful disciples; the terms of which is written in our hearts.

For the truth is, each one of us knows in our inmost hearts the gifts we have to share and the service we are called to do. So may we individually and together discern and do what God asks of us, in Jesus' name, so that we can confidently proclaim the words, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!" Amen.