

Sermon, Palm Sunday, 2023
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11
“Living Your Best Life: In Our Midst”
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I have several friends who are in Israel right now, and of course with the protests going on, I have been praying for their safety. I've looked with great interest at the photos they share. There is something about the pictures that speak to antiquity to the ancient world. Obviously, I looked to the pictures they shared on what would have been the road to Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Those pictures always make me think of great archaeological digs and what people find.

Of course, archaeological digs can be found anywhere. Sometimes in the most unexpected places. Take, for instance, under a parking lot in England. In 2012, archaeologists discovered a skeleton under that parking lot. It was at the site of the battle of Bosworth field where King Richard III met his end. There was immediate speculation that it was King Richard. It was a huge jump, and frankly ridiculous. Except it wasn't. DNA proved it as indeed the skeleton, pretty much the entire skeleton, of Richard.

Now, legend has it that the reason King Richard died was not a lack of military prowess but that a few small things conspired against him that caused him to fall off his horse and be killed. There is a proverb or nursery rhyme often associated with his death. For want of a nail, the shoe was lost; for want of the shoe, the horse was lost; for want of the horse, the rider was lost; for want of the rider, the message was lost; for want of the message, the battle was lost; for want of the battle, the kingdom was lost; all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

The meaning of the proverb is that there are no such things as small things. Sometimes the smallest things can add up to the most important victories. I think that's something we forget sometimes. We think that the world is changed by big events, by powerful people, by the rich and famous. And the more powerful you are, the more famous you are, the more wealth you have, obviously the greater the impact on the world you will have. Unfortunately, that doesn't leave much for the rest of us. We feel as if we are just spectators in the world, we watch events happen yet feel powerless to do anything because our contributions into the world are so small. We may feel, if not powerless, certainly insignificant at times with what we have to offer. It can cause us to wonder *if I don't matter, if I don't have much to contribute, then how is it possible for me to live my best life possible?*

Over the past many weeks, our Lenten series has centered on what it means to live our best life possible. Now that proposes a couple of things. One is that God wants us to live our best life possible. God loves you, and He wants you to live the best life possible in this world. Secondly, it means that it's possible to live your best life. And thirdly, we often have no idea of what's best for us. SO we have been looking at what does it mean, Biblically, to live our best life possible.

We find an answer in today's Gospel lesson. And it's such a small thing that I will almost guarantee that you missed it. Because I sort of missed how big a deal this actually is. We almost miss it because we get caught up in the pomp and circumstance of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But there is something incredibly significant that happens prior to this.

Jesus tells a couple of disciples to go to a village and there they would find a donkey and a foal tied up. Bring them to Me. If anyone asks you what you are doing, tell them I have need of them. It's just really a couple of sentences. Small, insignificant.

But I want you to put yourself in the place of the owner of that donkey. It's your donkey. And it's just had a baby. You need to take care of your property. That donkey is a part of your work, it's a part of how you get around, it's transportation, it bears burdens that you can't carry. It's a significant part of what it means for you to live. And it has a foal. That's another asset. You can use two donkeys, and if you can't use two of them, you can sell one. And you are expected to just let Jesus use them?

We never learn the owner's name. They are such a seemingly small part of this story that they have no name. There is no dialogue to memorialize them. In fact, we don't even get to see that part of the story. And yet, I submit to you that this simple moment of obedience, this simple act of grace, of gratitude, of generosity by someone who we don't even know becomes a fulfillment of an ancient prophecy and makes the triumphal entry possible. For want of a nail, the shoe was lost, for want of the shoe, the horse was lost. Had this proverb been written in the gospel, for want of obedience, the donkey was lost. For want of the donkey, Jesus doesn't fulfill the prophecy of being the Messiah.

If we truly want to live our best life possible, we must begin to understand how the Kingdom of God works. And in the Kingdom of God, there are no small moments. In fact, it is the small moments of obedience, of generosity or being willing to be gracious, that change the world. In the Kingdom of God, it is not the powerful, the rich, the wealthy, the beautiful, that truly change the world. It's in the small, quite ordinary moments of obedience and service that God uses to its greatest effect. After all, this is a King who appears first to a few shepherds around Him. This is a king who doesn't come in chariot or carriage with the wealthy at his coronation. It's the children, it's the poor, it's the ordinary people. There are no red carpets, only limbs cut from the trees. It's the ordinary folk who are brought close to the parade while the powerful and rich Pharisees are in the back of the crowd asking well who is this parade for?

My friends, if you want to live your best life possible, begin to realize that there will be times perhaps when you are put in the forefront, when you have opportunities to do great things. But more often, Jesus calls us to do small things. Acts of obedience. There are times when God asks us to do the most ordinary things. But we ought not despise these things, for it is in doing small things for God, the simple moments where you are trying to be obedient to Him, that God uses you to change the world. The world is not changed by the powerful, it is changed by the ordinary saint quietly trying to love Jesus and do His will. For want of the nail, the shoe was lost. So rejoice when God calls you to do the small things. Praying with your children, sharing Jesus' love over a cup of coffee, bringing a meal to a neighbor. There are no small acts of obedience in the Kingdom of God. Sometimes those acts are the moments God uses to change lives and save Kingdoms. Never despise or demean the small things you do in service to Jesus.

That doesn't mean, by the way, that they aren't costly. Sometimes God will call you to sacrifice. And that sacrifice to most people might not seem like it's a lot, but it's a lot to you. He may ask you to do something that seems to the world incredibly wasteful. That owner had a decision. Did he trust Jesus enough that he could give Him everything he had? Could he give up everything he had and trust that God was faithful and would take care of him? Would he be able to give up something knowing that no one would ever know? I mean, that's a part of it, isn't it? It's easy to be sacrificial when people can see how sacrificial you are and

they tell you how much they appreciate all you have done. It feels good. It's nice to get some recognition. It's different when you are told what you will do will change the world, but no one will ever know that you have done it. Small acts of sacrifice can change the world even when we don't get any credit for it.

My friends, we are at the beginning of the Holy Week. We see Jesus' triumphal into Jerusalem. See the fever pitch of jealousy brings His arrest, His crucifixion. And next Sunday, we will celebrate with Christians all over the world, shout Christ is Risen, He is Risen indeed. But it begins with one unknown person being willing to say yes to a simple request from Jesus. What might Jesus do with us if we are willing to say yes in small ways and live our best life possible? Amen.