
Does the Lord Need anything?

Luke 19:28-40

A sermon preached in Page Auditorium on March 20, 2016

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Does the Lord need anything? I was taught that God is self-sufficient in God's own being—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—an all-sufficient Trinity in their triune communion of three persons in one. What do we sing? Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The triune God is holy and whole, complete, total. God is all in all. God is one. If you want to figure out how to fix a divided world, how to come together, look to God because God is one, is unity. One of my pastor-mentors used to tell me, “God is God all by Godself.”

I was taught that God didn't need anyone or anything but then why would God create a world? We don't hear it in Genesis but the imaginary cultural production of poet James Weldon Johnson paints a distinct portrait of God at creation in his poem called “The Creation.”

*God stepped out on space
And He looked around and said,
I'm lonely—I'll make me a world.*

We don't know exactly why God created the world and although the triune God is three persons in one, loving relational unity, God still desires fellowship with creation. That's what Johnson's poem suggests—“I'm lonely—I'll make me a world.” God yearns for relationship, for fellowship, for *koinonia*. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit...” Maybe God needs something or someone with whom to be in relationship, not in order to be God, but to be love and to love. God is love, so it's not that within Godself, God isn't love already—there is a bond of love between the three persons of the Trinity but love, *agape* love, is never satisfied with remaining within oneself. This is why “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...” Love leads God to give for the world. God needed something or someone to truly embody selfless love in Christ; in this case, it's the world. God needed the world to show us love in Christ.

So I raise this question today, “Does the Lord need anything?” because as Jesus approaches Jerusalem and gives instructions to his disciples to get a colt, they tell those whom inquire, “The Lord needs it.” “The Lord needs it.” It's clear, from Luke, that the Lord doesn't need palm branches from trees or hosannas ringing for there are none in this story! But the Lord does need a colt. An animal. An animal that obviously never speaks in this story. The disciples speak. Jesus speaks. The owner of the colt speaks. Pharisees speak. We are even warned that stones may speak. But the colt is silent, the one creature the Lord needs.

This is a Palm Sunday story not about a man and his dog, but about a God and his colt. Jesus asks his disciples to find a colt “that has never been ridden.” In ancient times, animals were used for sacred purposes if they had not previously been employed in other service (1 Sam. 6:7). What does the Lord need? The Lord needs something or someone that is *available for use*, something that is not worn out and tired from the pressures of life or work. “The Lord needs it.” Something rested and willing to be used for holy purposes. And notice, as I said, that the colt is silent. God doesn't necessarily need another talking media head on TV or in the pulpit.

Do you remember the story about little Johnny? He was in church, getting restless as the preacher's sermon dragged on and on and on. He couldn't take it anymore so he leaned over to his father and whispered, "Hey, Dad, if we give him the money now, will he let us go?" Sometimes preachers can be all mouth but no message.

God doesn't need something or someone who's always making noise or always talking or always has the answers and is an expert on everything. "A jack of all trades, but a master of none." Sometimes, what the Lord needs is your silence and willingness to be used for the larger salvific purposes of God without saying a word. Sometimes your silence may actually make room to hear God's voice. Sometimes, it's critical to recognize that "silence is the door to God"(Howard Thurman). Sometimes, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us, listening may be a "greater service than speaking." Pastors, maybe the best sermon you'll ever preach is the one you proclaim with your life in silence. It may not be your speech God needs, but *you* that God needs. Your availability. "The Lord needs it."

Jesus needs a colt that is available for use. Officials used colts for civil, not military, processions, thus this isn't a triumphal entry in the Roman sense of triumphal processions; it is Jerusalem's reception of a meek and peaceful king. A royal savior requests a colt—a silent, lowly animal is the priority of Jesus, revealing Christ's deep love for the meek and lowly.

Jesus isn't the only one who affirms animals. According to folklore, St. Francis of Assisi, who is often portrayed with a bird in his hand, was travelling with some companions when they came to a place in the road where birds filled the trees on either side. Francis told his companions to wait for him while he preached to the birds. The birds surrounded him, intrigued by the power of his voice, and not one of them flew away. Sometimes birds or dogs will make for great patient congregation members who endure sermons, and better yet, they can't make comments like little Johnny.

Talk of birds and colts may seem foolish but "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God"(1 Cor. 1). God is always at work in surprising ways. Working through colts and others we may think unusable.

In a story by neurologist Oliver Sacks, "The Lost Mariner," we meet Jimmie, a man whose memory becomes worse over time. Jimmie always thinks it's 1945—Harry Truman is president, the war just ended, and this ex-sailor believes he still has his whole future ahead of him. Jimmie is a friendly fellow and you can have a good conversation with him but if you leave the room after visiting him and come back later, he won't remember and he'll greet you as if it was the very first time. Sacks believes that this condition makes Jimmie have no joy because he has nothing to look back on or nothing new to look forward to. He's stuck in the present moment. However, one day when Sacks was lamenting to a nun who runs Jimmie's nursing home about how Jimmie had lost his soul due to the brain disease, she reacts with outrage and tells him, "Come back tomorrow." Don't mess with a nun! The next day Sacks returned around the time they were celebrating Mass and what he saw shocked him. Jimmie was fully participating in the service, reciting familiar lines, saying prayers, and going to the communion rail to receive the bread and when he did this, his face showed an expression of calmness, and the joy that supposedly had gone. God was at work in Jimmie's life in indescribable ways that neuroscience, perhaps, couldn't even understand. We may be surprised who or what God uses to send a message or reveal God's presence and work in our midst. God makes unlikely choices all the time. If you want to know how unlikely, just look at us. It's pretty surprising, isn't it?

Does the Lord need anything? Yes. The Lord doesn't only need something or someone that is available but *productive as a co-laborer with God*. The colt is used to do work, earthly work for a heavenly purpose. The disciples get the colt and bring it to Jesus so he can ride on it down from the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem. Jesus doesn't accomplish his work alone but his disciples and this colt play an active part. Don't underestimate this silent lowly animal because its work involves carrying the Word of God among the people and going where God leads. It may not be viewed as the most luxurious or glamorous task in the kingdom but the colt ushers the King. The colt is willing to do the work called for by Jesus. The colt is not a disciple. The colt is not a person. The colt is a colt yet it finds a particular calling from Jesus. It has a place in the purposes of God. "The Lord needs it." The colt doesn't try to be a cow or a duck. It recognizes that it can only be a colt but the Lord still needs it. Its gifts. Its time. Its strength. The colt can only do what it does and it doesn't try to do something it cannot or be something it is not.

Maybe for human beings sometimes, we try to do something we cannot do or be something we are not. I encourage you to "do you." That's who God needs—you. Creative and productive people understand this. They stay on their highway, so to speak. They do what they do. A Hungarian psychology professor once wrote to famous creators asking them to be interviewed for a book he was writing. One of the most interesting things about his project was how many people said "no" to his request. For instance, management writer Peter Drucker wrote back: "One of the secrets of productivity ... is to have a very big waste paper basket to take care of all invitations such as yours—productivity in my experience consists of not doing anything that helps the work of other people but to spend all one's time on the work the Good Lord has fitted one to do, and to do well."

There's much wisdom in this because people are productive by staying in their lane, in their calling. If you're a colt, be a colt. If you're a pigeon be a pigeon. If you're a Tarheel, well, become a blue devil (this is what happens in March Madness!). It's that simple. Do what the Lord has called you to do and be who the Lord has called you to be.

Does the Lord need anything? The Lord needs something or someone that is available for use and something or someone that is a productive co-laborer. But the Lord also needs something or someone that is *free*. Notice that the colt has to be untied. Twice, the same question is asked—why are you untying the colt? And the answer is the same both times—"The Lord needs it." Jesus cannot use something or someone that is tied up or bound by anything. Jesus needs people or things that are free. A bound colt would be of no use to God just as a bound person would be powerless. If you are bound, you won't be able to be free in order to be used by God. God wants our freedom. God wants to liberate us from the ties that bind us to things, which can destroy or restrict us. Some of us are tied up with fear or anger or hate or low self-esteem or lack of courage. Tied up from the feet up so there is no movement, no possibility of progress, no energy to contribute to the work of God in the world, only stagnancy and sterility. If you are bound, you won't be able to be free enough to be used by God.

Jesus wants us free so free that he can use us as a witness for him. Will you be a witness for our Lord? "The Lord needs it." The colt, though silent and lowly, is a witness of how God works through all of creation. Even if the disciples were silent, Jesus tells us that the stones would shout out anyway. Shouting stones are a figure of speech but they remind us of how in the Bible creation is involved in the larger purposeful events of God. In Genesis, the sin of Adam and Eve causes the earth to produce thorns and thistles. In Isaiah, we hear of a time when cows and bears will graze together and the lion and lamb will lie down as bed buddies. In Matthew, there's a star shining in the East to announce the birth of Jesus and the earth shudders when he dies. And when Jesus was put on the cross, there was an eclipse of the sun for three hours. "All this dramatic language reminds us of that which we sometimes forget: all life is from God...and in the final reign of God "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God"(Rom 8:21) (Fred Craddock). The untying of the colt shows us the freedom that is necessary to do and be all that God requires. The freedom of the colt reminds us not only of the eventual freedom of all of creation but how the contemporary conversation about creation care is really linked to our care for God and for all creatures of our God and King. God wants all of creation, all of us, to be free

from bondage in order to obtain real liberty. God desires you and your service but also your freedom because he's a liberating God.

Jesus, himself, knew what it meant to be free. He was so free that his procession is not a military procession ready to do physical battle but a peaceful entry on a humble colt in the face of violence. He processes into Jerusalem only armed with vulnerable love to help that city live up to its name, which means 'peace.' The very things he needs from us he gives to us—Jesus made himself available for us and produced life by his lifeblood and by his Spirit we are set free. Jesus believes in freedom and he's so free that not even a cross will kill him forever. He who believes in freedom will not rest until it comes. He won't rest till we all are free indeed.

Does the Lord need anything? If we look at the colt's career, it's clear. The Lord needs you.