

---

---

## UNTIED

LUKE 19:28-40

A SERMON PREACHED IN DUKE UNIVERSITY CHAPEL  
ON PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 10, 2022,  
BY THE REV. DR. LUKE A. POWERY

---

---

I'm untied this morning. "Ride on, King Jesus...." I'm untied, I'm free, but I won't sing the whole sermon today even though it's Palm Sunday, Hosanna Sunday. For Luke, the gospel writer, it's another kind of Sunday. He doesn't even mention palm branches or hosannas. Can you believe it? But he mentions something else. Luke—the gospel with the best name for obvious reasons—is seemingly untied from tradition. He's free to emphasize something totally different. And do you know what it is?

A colt. A colt that has never been ridden and needs to be untied. Jesus seems to be obsessed with that colt's freedom. He tells two 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?' 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."

This unriden, untrained, untamed colt is what Jesus wants to untie and he wants that colt's freedom no matter what. I can almost hear that freed colt singing, 'Oh freedom....' This is Jesus's version of a blessing of the animals service but there are no iguanas in this one. It's a reminder that "the creation is involved in events that we tend to think affect humans alone." (Fred Craddock). Jesus's wild dangerous ride into Jerusalem affects everything and everyone—the disciples, the owners of the colt, the Pharisees, the colt itself and even the stones that will shout out if we don't!

This vision of the community of creation reminds me of 18<sup>th</sup> century Christopher Smart's poem, *Jubilate Agno*, parts of which 20<sup>th</sup> century composer Benjamin Britten set to music for his festival cantata, "Rejoice in the Lamb," which our three Chapel choirs performed beautifully for the spring oratorio. It's an example of an untied, free imagination. It says:

*For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry.*

*For he is the servant of the Living God, duly and daily serving him.*

*For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.*

*For this is done by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.*

*For he knows that God is his Saviour.*

*For God has blessed him in the variety of his movements.*

*For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at rest.*

*For I am possessed of a cat, surpassing in beauty, from whom I take occasion to bless Almighty God.*

At a later point, in that poem, we hear,

*For there is a language of flowers.*

*For the flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ.*

The free imagination of Smart points to how carnations, cats, canaries, colts, and all critters can be in service to Christ. We may sing, "all creatures of our God and King" because all creatures are *for* our God and king. As Abraham Kuyper once said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"

So Jesus has no problem in starting a ministry called 'colts for Christ.' That colt is mine, untie it, free it, loose it to serve a larger purpose for an unimaginable future. Unbind it and let it go.

This is really what Jesus wants for us too, not just colts—to be untied, to be set free from whatever holds us back. What has you tied down or tangled up and bound? Is it a relationship? Is it a job? Is it your own insecurity? Are you in a situation or pattern that you can't seem to get freed from? More than your stomach, your whole life is in a knot, and you don't know how to get untied. Well, this isn't just Palm Sunday. According to Luke, this is also Freedom Sunday. So this is your day.

Jesus comes riding on a colt to set us free, to untie us. Why? Because just like the colt, the Lord needs it. The Lord needs us to be free. He enters Jerusalem as a king, but not like the ancient king Alexander the Great, riding on a chariot pulled by white horses, crowned with laurels, in pomp and circumstance with prideful power to dominate and do violence in order to control. Rather, Jesus rides a wild lowly colt in humility and service and peace to set us free from whatever binds us.

But the irony is that the multitude of disciples praised God for the presence of Jesus saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" These words echo what the angels say when Jesus was born—"glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace and goodwill to all people." It is Lent but the disciples bring Christmas greetings during this paradoxical parade, revealing how Christmas comes "with a Good Friday price" (Tom Long)

It is a paradox of the ages—King Jesus will celebrate his own Passover with his life. The one who was born will die. A celebration in Bethlehem leads to an execution in Jerusalem.

The one who wants us untied will be tied to a tree, showing us that "acting on behalf of freedom is a dangerous undertaking" (Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder).

In the face of this inevitable and dangerous passion of our Lord, the plea of praise and prayer is heard out of the loosed tongues of the disciples—peace in heaven. Peace on earth. Peace in Ukraine. Peace on the streets of North Carolina. Peace in the United States Congress. Peace, something they needed then, something we need now. Christ's ride on that colt demonstrated that his reign would be one of nonviolence and freedom, not one of domination, oppression, and restriction.

Jesus wants us untied. He wants us free. From the very beginning of the story, we get a hint about this when he came near Bethphage and Bethany. Bethany was the home of Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. There might be a touch of Christmas in this story but there's also a taste of Easter resurrection. The untying Jesus calls for is a loosing, a releasing, an unbinding. It's not just for colts. It's what happens to Lazarus when he's resurrected in the gospel of John and Jesus says, "unbind and let him go." It's what Peter preaches in Acts about the resurrection of Jesus—"God raised him up, having freed/untied him from death." It's what John the Baptist refers to when he says he's not worthy to untie the thong of Jesus' sandals. Why? Because only Jesus can truly untie us from the knots we are in and untie us from prideful accumulation and domination rather than humble service; and untie us from violence and war rather than true lasting peace; and untie us from thinking we can never be used by God rather than trusting we have a purpose in service to Christ's mission in the world, just like that colt.

This is Freedom Sunday. And only Jesus can set us free and loose us for his purpose in the world. The Lord needs it. The Lord needs you. Throw your cloaks off at his feet as he rides into Jerusalem and comes into Duke Chapel. "Ride on, King Jesus..." In the name of Jesus, be set free. Amen.