

“CHRISTOPHER”

**A SERMON BASED ON THE GOSPEL OF
MATTHEW (21:1-11) AND PRESENTED FOR
ORLEAN UMC ON APRIL 5, 2020-----PALM SUNDAY**

BACKGROUND ANIMALS.

**THEY USED TO BE THOUGHT OF AS CHEAP AND
DISPOSABLE PROPS ON THE MOVIE SETS OF
HOLLYWOOD..... AS FILMS WERE BEING MADE,
HORSES WERE SHOCKED, TRIPPED, AND
FORCED TO RUN INTO TRENCHES..... WIRES
WERE STRUNG AROUND THEIR ANKLES AND
THEN YANKED BY THE RIDER TO MAKE THE
HORSE FALL ON CUE.....**

SIX HORSES WERE KILLED DURING THE FILMING OF THE ORIGINAL ---SILENT PICTURE --- *BEN-HUR* IN 1925, AND 25 WERE KILLED OR EUTHANIZED DURING THE EARLIEST VERSION OF *THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE* IN 1936.

THEN AN ORGANIZATION CALLED “AMERICAN HUMANE” GOT INTO THE ACT AND OPENED A HOLLYWOOD OFFICE TO ENFORCE STANDARDS FOR THE PROTECTION OF ANIMALS.

IN THE '50S, THEY SPONSORED THE FIRST OF AN ANNUAL PATSY AWARD CEREMONY. THE “PERFORMING ANIMAL TOP STAR OF THE YEAR” IS THE ACADEMY AWARD FOR ANIMAL ACTORS.

YOU MAY REMEMBER SOME OF THESE.....FRANCIS THE MULE WAS THE FIRST PATSY WINNER IN 1951, AND LATER WINNERS INCLUDED ROY ROGERS' HORSE TRIGGER AND ARNOLD THE PIG FROM "GREEN ACRES." IN 1973, AN ANIMAL ACTOR'S HALL OF FAME WAS ESTABLISHED, AND LASSIE WAS THE FIRST INDUCTEE.

IF THE "PERFORMING ANIMAL TOP STAR OF THE YEAR" AWARD HAD BEEN AROUND IN FIRST-CENTURY JERUSALEM, THE ANIMAL WHO CARRIED JESUS CERTAINLY WOULD HAVE BEEN A WINNER.

THIS DONKEY IS A PATSY.

MATTHEW TELLS US THAT JESUS SENDS TWO OF HIS DISCIPLES INTO THE VILLAGE OF BETHPHAGE TO FETCH A DONKEY AND A COLT. THIS IS TO FULFILL WHAT HAD BEEN SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH, “LOOK, YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU,” SAID THE PROPHET, “HUMBLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, AND ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A DONKEY” (MATTHEW 21:5; ZECHARIAH 9:9).

JESUS ENTERS JERUSALEM AS ZECHARIAH HAD PREDICTED, AND A LARGE CROWD SPREADS CLOAKS AND BRANCHES ON THE ROAD IN FRONT OF HIM. *THEY GREET HIM AS THEIR KING, SHOUTING “HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID! BLESSED IS THE ONE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!” (21:8-9).*

IT'S A HOLLYWOOD SPECTACULAR.

AS FOR THE DONKEY, SHE PLAYS HER ROLE AS INTENDED.

**WE CAN LEARN A LOT ABOUT SERVING CHRIST
FROM THIS DONKEY.....**

**AFTER ALL, THE *DISCIPLES* ARE NOT
PARTICULARLY GOOD PALM SUNDAY ROLE
MODELS FOR US..... THEY MAY STAND WITH
JESUS NOW, BUT IN A MATTER OF DAYS ONE
WILL BETRAY HIM AND ANOTHER WILL DENY
HIM..... THEIR ARGUMENT AS TO WHO WOULD BE
THE GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM WAS STILL
RINGING HOT IN THEIR EARS (20:20-28). IN FACT,
THIS WHOLE TRIP MADE THEM NERVOUS, WHAT
WITH JESUS TALKING ABOUT DEATH AND
SUFFERING, AND WITH VISIONS OF REGIME
CHANGE DISAPPEARING LIKE A MIST IN WIND.**

**THEY'RE FALLING OFF THE BANDWAGON
FASTER THAN A BLIND ROOFER.**

**THEY HAD SEEN A LOT, DONE A LOT, LISTENED A
LOT — BUT IN THE END, WHEN JESUS GIVES
THEM THE FAITH TEST, THE FINAL EXAM, IT
TURNS OUT THEY'RE NOT MUCH MORE THAN
GURU GROUPIES WITH NOT TOO MUCH OF A
CLUE.**

THIS COULD DESCRIBE A LOT OF

US.....COULDN'T IT!

**WE'VE FOLLOWED JESUS FOR YEARS NOW.
WE'VE SAT IN CHURCH, WE'VE DROPPED COINS
IN THE PLATE, WE'VE TAUGHT A CLASS HERE
AND THERE, PARTICIPATED IN LOCAL OUTREACH
MINISTRIES.....ENJOYED FELLOWSHIP AND OUR
POT LUCKS.....YES INDEED.....WE'VE DONE OUR
PART.**

**ALTHOUGH SOME OF US NO DOUBT HAVE MADE
IT TO THE CROSS, AND SOME OF US HAVE
ENDURED THE FIRES OF SUFFERING AND
EMBRACED THE FAITH TEST AND PASSED IT
CONVINCINGLY,**

**BUT TOO MANY OF US EITHER DON'T KNOW
WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FOLLOW JESUS INTO THE
STORM, OR WE'VE BAILED OUT AS THE STORM
APPROACHED.**

THE DISCIPLES ARE NOT THE ROLE MODEL

WE'RE LOOKING FOR.

**NOR ARE THE CROWDS. THEY'RE WORSE THAN
THE DISCIPLES..... THEY'RE CURIOUS, BUT NOT
COMMITTED. IN FACT, THEIR LOYALTIES CAN BE
BOUGHT AND SOLD..... THEY'RE SHOUTING
"HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID" TODAY, BUT
SOON THEY WILL REJECT JESUS AND CALL FOR
HIS DEATH (27:20-23).**

NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR EUGENE BORING
POINTS OUT THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE
CROWD KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS BUT
THEY CANNOT BRING THEMSELVES TO DO THE
TRUTH. -----THEY ARE LIKE COLLEGE STUDENTS
WHO MAKE AN A IN A COURSE ON ETHICS ... BUT
STILL FLUNK LIFE.

JESUS CAN STILL ATTRACT A CROWD. HIS
PICTURE IS OFTEN ON THE COVER OF *TIME* AND
NEWSWEEK TWICE A YEAR----- EASTER AND
CHRISTMAS.....

PEOPLE WILL FLOCK TO WHAT THEOLOGIAN AND COMMUNICATIONS EXPERT REX MILLER, IN HIS BOOK *THE MILLENNIUM MATRIX*, CALLS “CELEBRATION” CHURCHES, WHERE PEOPLE CAN SEE A SHOW —CHOREOGRAPHED AND STAGE-PRODUCED.

SO.....WHAT THEN.....WELL PERHAPS WE CAN TURN TO OUR *RELIGIOUS LEADERS*.

THAT’S A LAUGH..... THEY WERE CORRUPT, MEAN-SPIRITED AND JEALOUS. WHEN LAZARUS WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THEY CONSPIRED TO PUT HIM RIGHT BACK IN THE TOMB — WHERE THEY THOUGHT HE BELONGED.

THEY OFFERED AND TOOK BRIBES. THEY SOLICITED FALSE TESTIMONY. THEY CREATED A BOGUS TRIAL. THEY SENT AN INNOCENT MAN TO HIS DEATH.

TODAY, 95 PERCENT OF THE PASTORS AND PRIESTS AND RABBIS IN THIS COUNTRY ARE WITHOUT A DOUBT CARING, COMMITTED PEOPLE. BUT IT'S THE OTHER 5 PERCENT WHO'VE ABUSED CHILDREN, WHO FILL THE TELEVISION SCREENS ASKING FOR DONATIONS — MANY OF WHICH COME FROM FIXED-INCOME VIEWERS — AND USE THOSE DONATIONS TO PAY FOR LAWSUITS, OR SLEEK JETS, PALATIAL MANSIONS AND A FLEET OF CARS.

**THESE ARE THE FALSE SHEPHERDS WHOM
SOMEDAY GOD WILL STRIKE DOWN, AND WHO IN
THE MEANTIME CAUSE UNBELIEVERS TO SCOFF.**

SO WHAT'S LEFT?

**NOTHING, EXCEPT THIS PATSY, THIS "TOP
PERFORMER," THIS DONKEY.**

**THIS ANIMAL CAN TEACH US A LOT, *BECAUSE
SHE IS THE CREATURE WHO CARRIES CHRIST
INTO THE WORLD.***

**AND THAT'S WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT. CARRYING
CHRIST INTO THE WORLD.**

THE DONKEY WAS A CHRIST-BEARER, OR A *CHRISTOPHER* (DERIVED FROM THE GREEK MEANING “TO BEAR, TO CARRY”).

TODAY IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE THE NAME CHRISTOPHER (*CHRISTOPHERA IN ITS FEMININE FORM*) AS OUR OWN. BY DOING SO, WE COMMIT TO BEARING CHRIST TO THE WORLD.

BEING CHRISTOPHER MEANS:

- **SERVING CHRIST..... BEING A FAITHFUL SERVANT CAN BE A BURDEN.**

- **SERVING CHRIST HUMBLY WITHOUT CARING WHO GETS THE GLORY.**
- **FOLLOWING CHRIST'S DIRECTION; BEING WILLING TO GO WHERE HE WANTS TO GO, NOT WHERE WE WANT TO GO.**
- **NOT GETTING SPOOKED BY THE CROWDS, THE NOISE, THE ATTENTION.**
- **TAKING CHRIST INTO ENEMY TERRITORY.**
- **NEVER ASKING CHRIST TO "GET OFF OUR BACKS."**

- **BEING WILLING TO SHED THE “HERO” IMAGE**

PEOPLE WANTED TO PIN ON JESUS.

- **BEING OBEDIENT TO THE WILL OF THE ONE**

WHO HOLDS THE REINS.

**AS WE CARRY CHRIST INTO THE WORLD, WE
ARE CHALLENGED TO DO A PARTICULAR KIND
OF WORK, AND TO SHOW A DISTINCTIVELY
CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE.**

**THIS MEANS LETTING LOVE BE GENUINE, HATING
WHAT IS EVIL, HOLDING FAST TO WHAT IS GOOD.**

**IT INVOLVES REJOICING IN HOPE, BEING
PATIENT IN SUFFERING, AND PERSEVERING IN
PRAYER.....**

**TO LIVE IN THIS WAY MEANS THAT WE ARE
GOING TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEEDS OF THE
SAINTS, EXTEND HOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS,
AND EVEN GO SO FAR AS TO BLESS THOSE WHO
PERSECUTE US (ROMANS 12:9-14). IT MEANS
THAT WHEN OUR WHOLE CITY IS “IN TURMOIL,”
AS JERUSALEM WAS ON PALM SUNDAY, AND
THE PEOPLE AROUND US ASK “WHO IS THIS?”
(21:10), WE’LL BE ABLE TO GIVE THEM AN
ANSWER THAT SHOWS THEM THE WAY TO
EVERLASTING PEACE AND SALVATION.**

**IF WE CAN PULL THIS OFF, AND MODEL OUR
LIVES ON THE ONE CHARACTER IN THIS
MELODRAMA THAT DESERVES EMULATION, WE
WILL DISCOVER THE JOY THAT COMES FROM
CARRYING CHRIST.**

**WE'LL KNOW THE GLORY OF HEARING
HOSANNAS, THE THRILL OF CLOSE CONTACT
WITH JESUS, THE EXCITEMENT OF ACCEPTING A
CHALLENGE AND THE DEEP SATISFACTION OF
KNOWING THAT WE ARE WALKING IN THE WAY
OF GOD.**

**THERE'S NO BETTER ROLE WE COULD BE ASKED
TO PERFORM.**

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND
FOR ME.....AMEN!**