

PALM SUNDAY 1994

A sermon by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Palm Sunday, March 27, 1994:
Scripture Lessons: Mark 11:1-11.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Picture a place like the People's Bank parking lot somewhere in a little village outside Jerusalem. Picture the hitching post near the telephone building where the Amish tie their horses. There's a colt tied to the post, the colt of a donkey. A group of men loiter near-by. Then two men - two strangers- appear and begin to untie the colt. Those standing by shout, "Hey! Where you going with that animal?" They answer, "The Lord has need of him". And, then, as if by magic, there's no objection. The standers by let the two strangers take the colt. Apparently, the authority of the words and instructions given to the two disciples by Jesus answer all objections. And with no further opposition, the two disciples lead away the docile animal.

Now, take a closer look at that colt. Mark tells us that the colt that carried Jesus into Jerusalem had never been ridden. Jesus specifically instructed his disciples to find a colt that had not been ridden. I asked several horse experts in our congregation, "What's it like to ride a colt that's never been ridden?" The first person I asked said, "If you're thinking about riding one, forget about it, Atkinson." Someone else who knows a lot about horses said, "Colts that have never been ridden go crazy when you try to put something on their backs. They buck. They lie down and try to roll over. They'll do anything to get someone off their back." Another advised me that you don't have to worry about how to get off a colt that has never been ridden. Nature will take care of itself. But, he said,

"the difficult is getting on." But Jesus had no difficulty getting on or staying on. Jesus exercised his Lordship that first Palm Sunday by riding that colt. Jesus tamed that colt. The colt obeyed him. The colt took him where Jesus wanted to go. The colt didn't object... didn't complain.

This colt represents for me the mission of the church: to stay close to Jesus, to obey him and to carry Christ into the streets of our town. Jesus wants to tame us. Jesus wants us to obey him. Christ wants us to apply what we learn hear in church to business, politics, and social issues. Christians may not always agree as to how to apply the Lordship of Christ to the public area of life, but, as Christians, we seek to obey Christ and carry him into every area of life. Unlike the colt, though, the church is not always so obedient. The church often wants to keep Jesus in the sanctuary and doesn't want to take Jesus into the streets of our town by applying his teaching to every area of life.

The choir sang "O glory, laud, and honor" this morning. It's an ancient Palm Sunday hymn. One verse of that hymn has been removed from the newer hymnbooks. It says,

Be thou, O Lord, the rider
And we the humble ass,
That through the holy city
Together we may pass.

The Apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians that one day every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That hasn't happened yet. Many people in this town and in the world need to know that this world is not controlled by blind fate. This world is in the hands of the One whose

arms which stretched out on the cross to save this world. How do people come to confess Christ as Lord and trust his loving purposes for their lives and for the world? Through the faithful and winsome and compassionate witness of people like you and me who know and trust Christ.

The colt of a donkey is a beast of burden. We carry Jesus into the streets of our town through bearing the burden of love that Christ has for this town and for the world. We don't need to be flashy. We simply need to be like that young donkey on the First Palm Sunday. Obey Christ and take Christ to our friends through our service and compassion and honest testimony.

Let us pray: God of all, you gave your only-begotten Son to take the form of a servant, and to be obedient even to death on a cross. Give us the same mind that was in Christ Jesus, that, sharing in his humility, we may come to be with him in his glory, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.