



Columbia, Missouri
The Worship of God • April 10, 2022
Palm Sunday



THE SCRIPTURE
Luke 19:28-40

After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, “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.” Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

THE MESSAGE

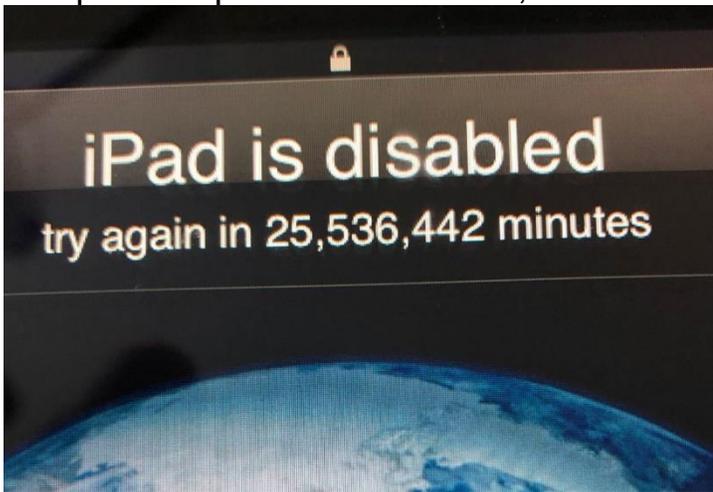
“Sacred Rhythms: Recognizing and Responding to the Presence of God”
Mark Briley

Time is a funny and amazing thing. We often wonder if we have enough of it; what we’ll do with the time we actually do have; and if we’ve wasted too much of it on things that don’t matter. Our instant society hasn’t helped much with this matter of time. We’re

attached to our devices and have allowed them to serve as our brains for the most part. And what once seemed like a speedy booting up of our Internet access with that crazy AOL sound that was made when it was launching now has us laughing at the thought of its lag. And we're more frustrated than ever if our high-speed Internet isn't firing on all cylinders.

What we certainly don't have time for is getting locked out of our devices. The agony! You get, what, like three chances to input the right password to unlock most devices before it goes on full lock down assuming your device has been stolen. Every wrong entry generally means a longer time you must wait before you can try the password again. If I mess up the first two times, I'm uber careful about getting the right combo of letters and numbers into that box to avoid the lock-out. We don't have time for a lock-out!

You can imagine, then, the agony Evan Osnos experienced when he discovered he was locked out of his iPad. His three-year-old son had unknowingly (*or was it?*) typed in wrong combos of letters and numbers an unfathomable amount of times. When his dad picked up his iPad to use it, he discovered the horrifying message saying that his device was disabled. Here's the kicker. It read, "*Try again in 25,536,442 minutes.*"



Based on when this went down, Osnos' iPad will not be unlockable until the year 2067.¹ Tweeting for help on another device, he got responses like, "*Time travel seems to be your best bet.*" Another suggested he "*reboot his 3-year-old.*" Osnos obtained the attention of the people at Apple, and they tried to help him though I'm not sure how it all worked out. The option of waiting another 45 years,

however, is something, he says, "*I'm just not willing to do.*" Can you blame him?

Spending time. Wasting time. Not giving the time of day to that thing, or that other request, or that purpose that is just not your calling anymore. What are you doing with your time? Are you stuck in the past? Are you forever daydreaming about the future? Is the present moment paralyzing; or are you ready to act, move, do that thing, live that purpose, *finally* force the issue?

It's Palm Sunday, my friends. A point in this sacred season of Lent where time is on our minds for all is set in motion... Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, even Easter, loom

¹ <https://www.techtimes.com/articles/241182/20190409/kid-locks-his-dad-ipad-until-2067-after-spamming-it-with-wrong-passwords.htm>

closely on the horizon... but none of it is set in motion without the triumphal entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem, which we recognize today.

It was time. In three years of ministry, Jesus is oft to say, *“It’s not yet the time...”* and *“Don’t talk about this widely just yet...”* but today signifies the Palm Sunday password was the entry to a whole new reality. And Jesus, while peacefully done, forces the issue that has every party asking, *“Is this the time?”* And it was. It was time for Jesus. It was time for those who were ready to pounce on Jesus. All was coming together. It was Passover time, of course, so the city was buzzing with activity as people were making all the arrangements for their celebrations. Jesus had discerned this was the time, indeed.

As our *Sacred Rhythms* series is nearing its climax, we’re considering the gift of discernment today, thinking about timing, choices, and decisions. Ernest Larkin says *“Discernment is truly a gift from God, but not one dropped from the skies fully formed. It is a gift cultivated by a prayerful life and the search for self-knowledge.”*

Discernment becomes a habit – a way of seeing that eventually permeates our whole life. Honed and practiced, we begin to develop an intuitive sense of God’s heart. Ruth Haley Barton calls this *“becoming familiar with God’s voice – the tone, quality, and content – just as we become familiar with the voice of a human being we know well. [In that recognition], we are able to grasp the answers to several key questions: ‘Who is God for me in the moment? Where is God at work, continuing to unfold love and redemption? Who am I most authentically in response?’”*²

Jesus has never been locked out of his access to the very heart of God. *Never.* They are One. And he longs for that Oneness for all of us, too. Discernment is that quest, to the best of our imperfect abilities, to be at One with the heart of God – in our decisions and in our relationships.

We would do well to ask Barton’s three questions as we move about the world. Jesus has discerned that the movement is now and thus embarks the events that make Palm Sunday, Palm Sunday before it ever had a title.

In fact, the day would have been more like our Mondays than anything else. Sunday was not the Sabbath or holy day like Sunday is for us. The Sabbath, for our Jewish friends, is sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. So, their Sunday would be more like a Monday-ish kind of day... Just another manic Monday, right? We even use the day as a downer saying, *“Somebody’s got a case of the Mondays,”* which means you’re grumpy. And people *are* grumpy on Mondays.

² *Sacred Rhythms*. Ruth Haley Barton. IVP Books, 2006. Her influence is evident in this message as well as in the formation of the entire series. This quote as well as the structure surrounding the three building blocks of discernment are found in her work.

I was driving through some congested traffic this past Monday and with a lane closure, people were having to merge into one lane. It was ironic that this SUV in front of me had this huge sticker on the back glass. It was a huge cross that had the words above it, “*Jesus Saves.*” It was like such a big statement. But that SUV refused to let anyone merge in front of them. The sticker may have more accurately said: “*Jesus saves, but I ain’t Jesus, and you ain’t mergin.*” Not the greatest witness, you know?

Anyway... Mondays, as the first day of the work week, symbolize the business of life continuing – life moving forward, getting back at the routine. The Monday drag. “*Rainy days and Mondays always get me down,*” sang the Carpenters. Now the Type-A personalities are all down for Mondays – a day to attack whatever needs to be done. Get things cranked up again.

Whatever the case... and it would be a bit different with the Passover celebration coming that week, but Jesus perches himself at the Mountain of Olives and sets the plan in motion – sending two of the disciples into the village to pick up a colt for his entry to the city. His instruction to them, should anybody be suspicious of their nabbing of this colt, is to simply say, “*The Lord needs it.*”

That’s a password that I would think gets you locked out of most places. When’s the last time you’ve tried it?

But, as far as the text itself goes, we have no hesitation from the disciples that this isn’t a good plan. Their discernment is grounded in this trust of Jesus to be who he says he is, and he hasn’t let them down yet.

Trust can’t be forced. Discernment can’t be forced. It is always a gift. We can learn to find ways of opening ourselves to it. There’s no formula or method, but it’s a way of being with a decision in God’s presence and allowing God to guide our knowing.

Barton suggests there are three crucial beliefs in the practice of discernment. The first is belief in *the goodness of God*.

The Belief in the Goodness of God

May seem like a straight-outta-Sunday-School-lesson but let’s be honest, many of us have trouble really believing in the goodness of God when it comes to our personal decisions. Generally, sure. God is good. For you? Of course. For your stuff? God is great. Just trust. But my stuff? Ooo... not so sure... making that leap, having what Barton calls *interior freedom* – a state of wide-openness to God – relinquishing

whatever might keep me from choosing for God what I want God to do for me – that’s a greater challenge.

We will always hold ourselves back from being fully open to knowing the will of God until we reach a place of accepting that there’s no “*catch*,” no limit to the goodness of God. In Process Theology, this is the idea of trusting that God has the next best option before us every step of the way. It’s not a once and for all – made the choice and I’m fallen for good or that the path is never afforded me again. God always has the next good thing primed for our choosing. This is comforting when you’re in a pinch. When you feel life is spiraling out of control, and you can’t see clearly the way ahead. Believe in the goodness of God. Trust that the next right thing is all that we need to focus on in those moments. Do the next right thing.

Barton’s second foundational building block of the discernment process is the belief that *love is our primary calling*.

The Belief that Love Is Our Primary Calling

You ask yourself this question: “*Which choice enables me to keep following God into love?*” There may be other factors to consider, of course, but the deepest one will always be, “*What does love call for in this situation? What would love do?*” Or as we like to ask here at Broadway: “*Where does love lead?*”

Love is such an inconvenience sometimes, isn’t it? It challenges our self-centeredness. It makes us vulnerable. It’s risky. There are no guarantees. But if we fail to ask this question of ourselves in Christian discernment, then we miss the whole point of the Christian life in the first place.

I think *industry* has skewed some of this “*love*” question for us. Love has been materialized or industrialized to an extent that it has become a commodity. Seth Godin noted this very thing about art. He said, “*Art has been around for a really long time. Music has been around for a really long time. Painting and sculpture and plays have been around for a really long time. But it’s only in the last fifty years that there’s been an **industry**... they call it the music **industry**, the movie **industry**... that’s new ... It used to be, you didn’t become an artist to become rich, you became an artist because you had an idea to share, because you had an emotion to share.*”³

These mixed motives throw us off in the discernment process. Has love become an ***industry?***

³ From an interview in the documentary, *PressPausePlay* 2011.

The disciples going after this “*Lord-needs-it*” colt surely had some conversation on the way to the village. ‘*This is it,*’ one said to the other. “*Yep. He’s gonna be king!*” “*Fo sho.*” “*And we’ll always be able to say we were the ones who got the wheels that he rode into his coronation on.*”

I don’t know. They probably sorted through their own motives and concerns, wonderings, and selfish ambitions. Who knows? This purity-of-love question about following God into love is an important component of discernment. Jesus is clear at this point. Question one: “*Is God good?*” No doubt. Question two: “*What’s love’s next move?*” Clarity. He’s going to enter the main arena and demonstrate what love looks like. It’s time.

That opens us to the third, and final, building block of discernment Barton shares believing that “*God communicates with us through the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is given to help us know the demands of love in our situations.*”

***The Belief that God Communicates with Us
through the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit Is Given
to Help Us Know the Demands of Love
in Our Situations***

This spiritual confirmation starts with a prayer of indifference. That’s a counterintuitive thought... indifference is the worst, right? Luke-warmness is nauseating. That’s scriptural. But this prayer of indifference is such a Zen moment of clarity and openness in the presence of God. In this case it means, “*I am indifferent to anything but God’s will.*” I want God’s will, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. In such a space I become capable of relinquishing whatever might keep me from choosing love. Jesus prays, “*Your will be done, God.*” Final word. That’s clarity.

Teenage Mary, the would-be-mother-of-Jesus, demonstrates this courage when most of us worried about who snap-chatted whom and what color of bands to get in our braces. She’s told there’s a calling on her life to walk this pregnant road and she’s such a baller. She says, “*Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.*” (Luke 1:38).

No wonder Jesus had such strength. No wonder, as he stood on that mount and imagined entering Jerusalem that he was clear about his direction. His mama had such strength.

This indifference stuff is so hard though, don't you think? I do. To come to a place of indifference on such weighty choices? Barton says, however, "*Until we have come to a place of indifference, any prayer for wisdom may well be something akin to a rigged election.*"

What do you, what do I, need to set aside in order to be open to what God wants? We may struggle to get to such a spiritual place. And when such is the case, "*All we can say to God is, 'I know I am not indifferent. I know there is still something in me that is clinging to my own agenda. If I am to become indifferent, you will have to do it in me.'*" (Barton).

Such a period of waiting to follow can be challenging but can also feel deeply right in our bones – right where we need to be. Like the prophet Jeremiah who wanted to quit prophesying but couldn't shut it up even in his bones, and Jesus who stood to enter the city, marching toward his crucifixion, there is something like that in all of us – something so essential to who we are and who God made us to be that we cannot set it aside without imploding. What is that for you? What is that calling? What is that risk? What is that truth? And what. are. you. going. to. do. about. it?

"The-Lord-needs-it" password works. The colt is released to carry Jesus into the city, the disciples do that thing where you interlock your fingers so Jesus can step up into their hands and be hoisted onto the colt and they're off. The case-of-the-Mondays crowd awakened, and the celebration was on. People rushed out to see! Businesspeople pulled off their expensive suit jackets and threw them in the streets ahead of the colt carrying Jesus as sign of respect. A trio of trumpet players, moved from their open cases collecting coins for playing New Orleans's style jazz, stood, and blared, "*All Glory, Laud and Honor!*" No mutes. Full blast. The crowds grew in their chanting, and it was deafening.

The religious folks were concerned about the ruckus as there were additional Roman military folk on hand to keep things under control. The Romans didn't need much reason to get forceful with people and nothing ruins a good Passover Party like a riot. The Pharisees tried to get in earshot of Jesus, yelling, "*Jesus – seriously – this is a problem. You're gonna ruin Passover for all of us. Get your disciples under control.*"

But Jesus knows the time has come... and there's nothing more to be done than step into his full calling of love. Jesus hollers back, perhaps with a knowing shrug, "*If they keep quiet, the stones would do the cheering for them.*"

And so, it is. The launch of this most holy of holy weeks. Are you up for it? What prayers do you need to pray? What time do you need to set aside? What discernment will you do to determine your next steps? How will you recognize and respond to the

very presence of God? May we begin with a prayer... the words of Thomas Merton, to guide us into the mystery of this moment, of this week, of the greatest decisions of our lives. Let us pray...

*"My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself. And the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you and I hope I have that desire in everything I am doing..."*⁴

Amen and Amen.

SONG OF FOCUS

"Recognize, Respond"

WORDS AND MUSIC BY ED VARNUM

1. It was the day we call Palm Sunday, and our Lord knew his time was near.
He sent disciples, saying, "You'll find a donkey. Bring it to me here.
And if one asks, you say, 'The Lord has need of it.'"
2. And they did as he said, and one did ask, "Just why do you untie this colt?"
They said as they were told, and the man who asked them bowed and let them go.
Somehow the owner knows!
He recognized the will of Christ and recognizing followed through.
So, may we recognize, respond, thus God's will to do.
3. And through the gates of Jerusalem, Lord Jesus on that donkey rode.
Some shouted loud hosannas while laying down palm branches and their cloaks,
while others shouted, "Hoax!"
Lord, may we be like those who saw and knew, and rejoicing followed you.
Recognize, respond, thus God's will to do.

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH

⁴ From Merton's *"Thoughts in Solitude"* as shared in Barton's *Sacred Rhythms*.