

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, April 14, 2019
Rev. John Tapscott

“JESUS’ PASSWORD”

Luke 19:31

Anyone who uses a computer and the internet knows that you often need a password. Actually you need more than one, since different websites require different forms of passwords. I have about four and it can be a challenge to remember which one I have used for a given site, especially if I haven’t visited that site in a while. Often I have to make a request to create a new password. Some employees are required to change passwords every month or so. It’s good for security, but what a headache.

Do you know that Jesus once used a password? Well, he didn’t use it himself but he once gave two of his disciples a pre-arranged password to use. It was easy for them to remember. And it’s easy for us to remember too. Here it is - “The Lord Needs It.”

Today we read from Luke 19:28-40 telling of Jesus’ final, triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Now Luke actually doesn’t mention palms and his account seems more subdued than the account provided by Matthew and Mark. But the story is essentially the same.

Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, and going up is right, for Jerusalem is a city set on a hill. But to get there, you also have to go down a steep incline and cross a valley before climbing the final hill to the city. Jesus had come near the towns of Bethpage and Bethany, on the outskirts of Jerusalem, at the Mount of Olives. He told two of his 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 you are untying it, just say this, “The Lord needs it.”

So the disciples went into the town and found it just as Jesus had told them. Clearly Jesus had made prior arrangements with someone to provide him with a donkey for the triumphal entry. Now it’s just my own speculation, but I wonder if it was Lazarus of Bethany who provided the colt, literally a donkey, for Jesus. You recall from John’s Gospel that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. The name Lazarus means “the one whom God helps.” And Lazarus lived in Bethany. Perhaps Lazarus was now helping Jesus by providing him with the needed donkey. In any case, the donkey’s owners asked the disciples, “Why are you untying it?” The disciples used the password that Jesus had given them, “The Lord needs it.” So they brought the donkey to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks on the beast, they set Jesus upon it. People threw their cloaks on the road, setting a carpet for the coming King. As Jesus rode down the steep path from the Mount of Olives his followers began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power 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.”

There were probably two reasons why Jesus needed the donkey to ride into Jerusalem. First, because donkeys are very cautious animals. Donkeys have a reputation of being stubborn, but that's because they are careful by nature. I remember walking on the roadway down from the Mount of Olives, the very path Jesus was taking. It is very steep. Today it is paved. Not so back then. Jesus chose a careful, cautious donkey to carry him safely down that steep, rugged path.

The other reason Jesus chose a donkey was highly symbolic. Jesus was deliberately fulfilling a prophecy from Zechariah, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem. Behold your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey." When a King rode into a city to conquer by warfare he rode a large white horse. But a king coming in peace rode on a donkey. By riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus was making a deliberate statement, "I am coming as the King of peace. My victory will be the victory of suffering love." So for a couple of reasons Jesus needed that donkey to ride into Jerusalem. "The Lord needs it."

What does the Lord need today, from us his followers? Well I am going to answer that question. But first I am going to ask and answer, "*What do we need from Jesus?*"

What we need from Jesus is his death on the cross.

Now the people along the roadway did not know how Jesus' journey would end five days later. Jesus had told his disciples that he must die, but even they didn't really grasp it. Certainly the disciples were happy on the day of his triumphal entry, though that would change soon enough. In the Upper Room Jesus used unforgettable symbols to show that he must die. He broke the bread and lifted the cup saying, "This is my body broken for you...this is my blood shed for you."

This is Palm Sunday, but it is also Passion Sunday. Today we go from Jesus riding a donkey to Jesus dying on a cross. Jesus died on the cross because we need it. Our forgiveness, our being put right with God, our hope of eternity, all come from Jesus' death. If Jesus hadn't died for us, we would have to make ourselves right with God. But how can unholy sinners make themselves right with the three times holy God? Well, we can't. There is no merely human sacrifice that is adequate. So in love God says, "I myself will provide the sacrifice my righteousness and holiness and justice require." That sacrifice was God's own dear, sinless Son. On the Cross Jesus, God himself in human flesh, took our sin upon himself and made atonement. Paul says, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," Jesus cried out as they crucified him. And the Father did. The divine forgiveness won by Jesus on the cross was poured out on resurrection day for the whole world, for you and for me, to accept by faith.

Do you recall that incident in the Gospels where the large curtain in the temple was torn in two as Jesus died? The symbolism is very meaningful. No longer do God's people enter God's nearer presence by the blood of lambs, bulls and goats. Those temporary sacrifices pointed to the final sacrifice, Christ himself. Now we enter God's Kingdom and his nearer presence through Jesus' broken body. Jesus' death opened the way. But the torn curtain also means that Kingdom blessings can now come freely to us. Jesus' disciples shouted as he was riding along. "Peace in

heaven, and glory in the highest heaven.” Through Christ crucified the way has been opened for heaven’s peace to come to us now - the peace of forgiveness, the peace of reconciliation, the peace of knowing that you are accepted by God now and forever. We need the cross for it is through Christ crucified that we go to God. Furthermore, it is through Christ crucified that heavenly blessings come to us now.

In his book, *The Living Christ in Modern China* the missionary George Young tells of his Chinese teacher Mr. Lu. At first Mr. Lu found this story very strange - an obscure Galilean peasant put to death as a criminal. His interest quickened as they read together Jesus’ teachings, but Mr. Lu still preferred Confucius. The story of the Prodigal Son made him confess, “I have always believed in God, but I did not know that God was like that father.” But Jesus’ death on the cross reduced him to silence. He asked, “Why did Jesus die like that?” In broken Chinese George Young answered, “He died for you and for me.” Then Mr. Lu wept, a most unusual thing for a Chinese man. Wrapping up his books in a red cloth he went out muttering, “He died for me. He died for me.” He returned the next day and said joyfully, “Pastor Young, I have become a follower of Jesus.”

What do we need from Jesus? We need his cross. Thank God that his Son persevered to the end and was obedient unto death – even death on a cross. There is no Gospel, no good news without his death on the cross. The Cross of Christ is the clearest demonstration of God’s love for the world, for you and for me. Paul tells us, “God shows his love for us in this – that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

But now let’s come back to our text and the Lord’s glorious password. “The Lord needs it.” *Let’s ask, “What does the Lord need from us, today?”* I am going to name two things, both of which are suggested by our reading today.

First, the Lord needs our perseverance.

The crowds which lined the roadway were excited about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. They were looking for a king to drive out the Roman enemies, and to re-establish the Kingdom of David. But the fact that Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem signified that he was not that kind of King. He was the King of love, the King of peace. So the people along the roadway were enthusiastic on that day, but that enthusiasm soon waned. To be sure, they were not the same people who in just a few days shouted “Crucify him!” But they soon forgot about Jesus. Their enthusiasm was short-lived.

Many people are like that with the Christian faith. We’ve seen it often. They come to church and get excited about the faith and the church and what it’s doing. They confess their faith in Christ, join the church and get involved in the church’s work. But soon enough their enthusiasm wanes. Other things catch their attention. The secular world starts to seem more attractive. Doubts and troubles may undermine their faith and commitment. Their church attendance becomes sporadic, and they may even drop out altogether. They lack perseverance.

Let me tell you that Jesus Christ needs our perseverance. Yes, Jesus' closest followers fell away in those terrible hours of darkness around his crucifixion, but after the resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit, they were the most persevering disciples ever. Jesus built the church through them and on them; and spread the message of salvation to the ends of the known world. It is the same in every generation. Jesus needs faithful, persevering disciples who refuse to be distracted. He is not like a media star who gets his fifteen minutes of fame and then fades away. Jesus is Lord and King forever. He deserves your constant and ongoing devotion, and mine. He needs faithful followers who persevere through ups and downs, joys and sorrows, who put their hand to the plow and keep on going, who keep on serving, who keep looking ahead and above with faith and hope. It is on such faithful disciples that Jesus builds his church. The book of Hebrews tells us, "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us... let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..." And Jesus promises the crown of righteousness to all who persevere to the end.

Here's the other thing he needs from us - our witness.

We read in verses 39 and 40. '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 story of Jesus and his saving love must be told. It is such a wonderful story that it cannot help but be shouted aloud and abroad. And Jesus needs us to do it. He needs us to be living stones who tell what God in Christ has done for all. He needs us, who have opened our hearts to him in faith, to now open our lips about him. He needs us to be his witnesses, and to speak for him, just as his early followers did. Tell someone about Jesus. Be a living stone who speaks, so that others may hear and believe and be saved.

"The Lord needs it." What does he need from you and me? He needs our perseverance and our witness. In fact, he not only needs these things, he first gives them to us. He gives us the quality of perseverance that was in him, and he gives us the words of the Gospel story to speak. And then he sends us forth in the power of the Holy Spirit.

"The Lord needs it." The Lord needs you. May that be the password you live by and the one you never forget.