

THE MAN WHO LOANED THE COLT
Luke 19:28-34

I'm just a simple man, really. And I've lived a very simple life. I've never been well known. As a matter of fact, I guess I'm still not. I'm just a humble shopkeeper living in a little town called Bethphage.

My life has been pretty quiet and very routine. I was raised in the home of a shopkeeper. As a child, I spent my days in my father's shop where he sold fabrics and dyes. As I grew older, I was able to help my father with some of the little jobs around the shop.

Eventually, when I became a young man, I could do everything he could do. I could greet the people as they arrived, show them the bolts of cloth, measure the fabric, cut it to size, fold it and wrap it, charge them a fair price and send them on their way fully satisfied.

Oh, yes. And I could go to get the fleece, too. We have a whole network of suppliers. I know where to find the shepherds that sell raw wool. I know my fleece well enough to be able to grade it and determine which could make light wool garments and which would make heavy, course and very warm clothing.

I go to get it and I bring it home on our donkey. When I get it home, we wash it and scour it to remove the grease and the lanolin as well as the insects, the grass, leaves and twigs that inevitably get tangled into the coat of the sheep.

After the wool is thoroughly cleaned, we blend different types of wool to secure the weight and texture we desire. Then we dye the wool to achieve just the right shades of color that our customers demand.

After that, we spin the fibers into yarn and then we weave the yarn into cloth. We have a few workers who help us with the spinning and weaving but we do it all here in our own shop.

I said "we do it all here in our own shop." And we do. But my father is advanced in years and he can no longer help us with this process. His hands just don't have the strength. And the years of stooped labor have taken their toll on his back so that he is not able to work much at the benches any more. But he still greets the people and he still knows them all by name. And so do I.

At least I usually know our customers by their names. A few weeks ago, we had a customer that we'd never met. She was from out of town. From Galilee, in fact. I could tell by her accent.

She came in looking for a bolt of scarlet wool. She wanted our most durable fabric. She said she was going to make a cloak for her son. As I showed her the

various scarlet cloths, we visited. She told me her son was a rabbi, a teacher, from Nazareth in Galilee. She said he traveled constantly, going from village to village to teach. She said he drew large crowds who wanted to hear him speak. She also said that her son was very compassionate to others, particularly to the children, the ill and the infirmed. She said that he did many things to assist them and that he had even performed some miracles to heal some of them.

In spite of the fact that he was good about helping so many others, she said he was not very good about taking care of himself. That's why she was going to make him a cloak. In his travels, he often slept outside, on the ground. And the cloak he had been wearing was threadbare and torn. She wanted him to have something warm. And she liked scarlet. She thought it would look good on him with his dark and rugged features.

She told me that she wanted a very durable fabric...something that would last him for many years.

I directed her attention to one particular bolt of cloth that was quite heavy. I told her it was very warm, very strong and very longwearing. I explained that with proper care, a cloak made from this material could last her son for the rest of his life.

For some reason, that comment seemed to startle her. A small gasp escaped her lips and her hand trembled as she touched the cloth. She stroked it gently and then spoke softly.

"This should be fine," she said. And she paid for it and prepared to leave.

At the door, she turned back to me and asked if I would like to see the finished cloak. She said her son would be going to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast and she could ask him to stop by my shop on his way home after the feast so I could meet him and see the cloak. I told her that would be fine. I would love to meet her son and I would be delighted to see the cloak.

Then she asked a favor. She asked if her son could borrow my donkey when he went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. I told her that normally I would not hesitate to loan her our donkey but that, regretfully, it would be unavailable that week. One of our Gentile servants was going to be taking the donkey on an extended buying trip to purchase dyes and other supplies. He would be gone for more than a week. We figured the time of the feast would be a good time for him to be gone since we would be in Jerusalem for the celebrations.

She looked quite disappointed. I felt so sorry for her that I offered that we had another young donkey. Really, more of a colt. We were just beginning to break it to the halter and to carry loads as a pack animal. I told her that her son could use her, if he would like. The colt had never been ridden but they might be able

to put some of their supplies on her. She would probably be alright for carrying their things.

The woman thanked me and said that she would accept my offer. She said that one of her son's companions would call for the colt on the Sunday before the Feast. She told me how to recognize him. He would say, "This is for the Lord."

That seemed like a strange sort of a password to me but I certainly would remember it so I said that was fine and that I would have the colt ready and waiting on that Sunday.

The time went quickly and I'd nearly forgotten about the woman, the cloth and the colt. I had not intended to have the shop open that week but early Sunday morning, I happened to remember that I had agreed to loan her the colt so I got it out of the stable, took it around to the front of the shop and tied it up. I hoped the man would come for her soon so I could go on into Jerusalem for the festivities.

During the morning, I noticed two men starting to untie the colt. I went out to ask them why and they said, "The Lord needs it." Well, I had only expected one man to come for the donkey but these two knew what to say so I figured it was alright. I let them take her.

With that, I shut the shop and went on into the city.

When I got to Jerusalem, it was kind of strange. The road was lined with people and the whole city was astir. Word was out that Jesus of Nazareth was going to be coming to Jerusalem for the feast. Some said he was the Messiah, God's Anointed One who had been promised for centuries.

We all knew that when Messiah came, he would establish his kingdom in Jerusalem, the Romans would be driven out and we would be a sovereign nation again. The prophets had also foretold that when Messiah came, we would enjoy a golden age of peace and prosperity. Oh how we all hoped that he would come soon.

Perhaps this Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. Only God knows and only time will tell.

Since so many people were standing along the road to get a glimpse of Jesus and to welcome him to town, I thought I would just take a place among them and watch for him.

Pretty soon, a whole crowd of people were seen coming down the road from the very direction I had come. They were shouting and singing and chanting. They were saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" As they

got closer, the crowds along the street took up the chant and they added, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

As the crowd in the road passed by, I finally got a glimpse of Jesus. I saw that people had been pulling palm branches from the trees along the route and they were spreading them in front of Jesus like a green carpet. And I saw that people had been taking off their cloaks and spreading them on the road, too. And on his donkey.

His donkey! I couldn't believe my eyes! His donkey was *my* donkey...my colt. The one that had never been ridden before in its life. I don't know how it happened but this unbroken colt was walking along like the best-broke animal in the world. People were shouting and singing. They were waving palm branches and throwing coats right in front of the colt's head and she never flinched. She seemed totally at peace with all that was going on.

And there, seated on the colt, was a man wearing a stunning scarlet robe. I was sure that was the cloak from the cloth that came from my shop. I certainly looked forward to meeting him when he came back through Bethphage on his way home after the feast. And I wanted to admire that new cloak. It was beautiful.

Almost before I knew it, the crowd had swept by and had proceeded into the city. Many who had lined the road fell in behind the crowd and joined them in their procession.

I did not. I went on back to the shop to try to figure out what I had seen. This Jesus must be the son of that gentle woman, I reasoned. Some people had said he was Messiah. And his mother said he had performed miracles to help sick people. I don't know about that but I know this: if someone can ride an unbroken colt in a parade through that kind of a crowd, that is some kind of miracle in my book. He certainly got my attention. And I began to think of things I wanted to ask him when he stopped by my shop after the Feast.

But he never came back by the shop. Late in the day on Sunday, just an hour or so before sundown, the two men came back with my colt. They tied her out front of the shop and left quickly without saying a word.

Each day, during the Feast, I made the short walk from home into the city for the festivities. Early in the week, all the talk was about Jesus of Nazareth. Late in the week, all the talk was about Jesus of Nazareth. But the talk had changed during the week.

Early in the week, it seemed people could speak of nothing but how he must be Messiah. But by the end of the week, people had become impatient and disillusioned.

He came to town but he did not mount an attack against the Roman soldiers. He came to the temple but he did not announce that he was Messiah. He didn't do any of the things we would have expected Messiah to do.

And he did one thing we never would have expected Messiah to do. Some Gentiles had come to the temple. Because they were not Jews, they were not allowed into the Court of Israel so they stood outside and sent in word that they wanted to see Jesus, too. When Jesus heard of their request, he prepared to go out to meet with them. Some of the people tried to stop him but he said, "Don't you understand? When I am lifted up, I will draw all men to me." A hush fell over the room. "All men?" "ALL MEN?" Messiah is to be King of the Jews. What's this "all men" talk? If he wants to be King of the Gentiles, he cannot be King of the Jews. That means he cannot be Messiah.

A buzz went around the temple and spilled out from the temple into the streets. People's hopes had been so high about Jesus being Messiah and now they were so angry. They felt like they'd been duped. And used. And they turned on him. The very people who had been saying, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" were now the ones saying that he should be punished for being a pretender. He should be killed for getting their hopes up so high and then dashing them.

That sentiment was stoked by our religious leaders. They wanted him done away with, too. They were afraid he would upset the Romans and that we would suffer if he were still around so they kept stirring up the crowd to demand that Jesus be arrested.

On Thursday night, he was. And on Friday, he was executed. I must confess that I went to his execution. I went and I watched as he was nailed to a cross and hung out to die. I saw a lot of things that day that I will never forget. But one of the things that is most memorable to me: I saw the soldiers gambling for his cloak...his scarlet cloak...made with cloth from my own shop. And I watched as one of them took his prize, threw it around his shoulders and strutted off laughing. He mocked Jesus on his way past the cross. He asked, "Hey, do I look like a king in a robe like this?" But Jesus never said a word. He just writhed in pain and gasped for breath.

I stumbled home. I was in no mood to celebrate the Passover or anything else. What I had seen was repulsive. And my mind was spinning with thoughts as I tried to make sense of what seemed so senseless.

On the next Sunday, one of our regulars came bursting into the shop with word that Jesus had been buried on Friday but that by Sunday he was gone. His grave was empty and people were searching for his body. Then, in a breathless whisper he confided that some were saying he came back to life and walked out of the grave.

It didn't seem possible to me. But it didn't seem possible to me that anyone could ride an unbroken colt in a crowd the way he had a week ago. And I know he did that. I saw it with my own eyes.

Over the next several months, I had the chance to learn more about this Jesus. And I came to believe that he really is Messiah. I finally realized that we'd had it all wrong. He never did intend to overthrow the Romans and drive their soldiers from our land. He said his Kingdom was not of this world. He said that his Kingdom was within us. And he wanted to drive out the enemies we had battling inside of our hearts and our souls.

When I heard the whole story, it seemed like incredibly good news. I believed it and I prayed that Jesus would come into my heart and drive out my enemies. I prayed that I would experience peace in my soul because of him. And do you know what? I do.

And so, my friends, I must ask you: Do you want to experience that same kind of peace? Let me tell you what to do: Trust Jesus and let him reign as the King of your life and you will have the same joy and the same peace that I have found.

INVITATION: #581 – *“Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus”*