

Beasts of Burden, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. L6060409
Isaiah 50:4-9a and Mark 11:1-11
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You and I are donkeys. I am not calling us names. I am stating that we committed Christians are the donkeys on which Jesus rides into world, just as he rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The *Random House Dictionary* defines a donkey as a “Long-eared patient, sure-footed animal.” As an animal used for carrying burdens and for agricultural operations, a donkey is a beast with a lot of strength. In Biblical times, the donkey was representative of peace.

Jesus rides on us into the world. Jesus can't come into the world without us. He is not made real through the words of the Bible, not through the walls of a building with a steeple, and not even through the words of preachers. Jesus is made real to people through the actions and words of the committed Christians they meet in daily life. As you show care and concern for people, you make Christ real to people. As people see our actions based on faith, they see the genuineness and reality of faith, and they want it too.

A donkey is a long-eared animal. Big ears are symbols to us of our role as Christians. They are not to listen to gossip, or to people putting others down. The big ears are to listen to people's problems. We listen to them and in listening, we help them solve their own problems. My counseling is not so much to give advice as to listen. Most of my doctoral training was to keep my mouth shut and ears open.

A donkey is a patient animal. We can take time as we listen to people and as we show concern for them. We are not in a hurry to get on with our own life. We are not in a hurry for solutions. We can wait for God to work in God's time, and not according to our needs for immediate results.

A donkey was a representative of peace. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on this animal, not on a war horse or chariot. Many who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem would rather he had ridden a war horse. They were anxious to overthrow Roman rulers and restore the throne of Israel once more.

For Jesus, a donkey represented humility. Jesus had fought the temptation to be a great public figure, giving in to those who shouted to him as king. Riding a donkey was comparable to his defenseless death on cross and to his prayer, “Let this cup pass from me.”¹ The Church, then, upon whom Jesus rides into the world, must represent peace and humility, or Jesus is not found with us. The Church as suffering servant and the Christian life as an unpopular way of living are much more effective than the triumphal domineering church that once existed when the church commanded armies and controlled peoples' lives.

This building should be place of peace. We Christians should be people who live lives of peace. The Church must learn the servant role. We here to serve others and to serve community. We are humble: not proud of being better than others, or richer, smarter, or stronger. Humility means being able to be ourselves: no better, no worse than others; to admit our mistakes and faults, and to correct them.

Donkeys have a reputation of being stubborn. Some Christians are stubborn the wrong way, yes. But, there are times we need be stubborn. We need to be stubborn in an open and growing faith so we can withstand our own doubts and the doubts of people who deny God. If we are stubborn in the right ways, we can show others that we are not going to compromise our faith.

A stubborn faith can show that God is real. It can provide strength, love, and hope in the face of opposition. A stubborn faith will not be led astray by temptations, arguments, or the popularity of others. If our faith is stubborn, we can argue our faith. We can show others the meaning faith has for us.

Perhaps rather than stubborn, it might be more helpful to use the image of a donkey as a sure-footed animal. We know where we are going and where we are setting our feet down as we move along the path of life. A number of years ago, Sue and I went to the Grand Canyon. We hiked to the bottom. On the trail, we had to step around the droppings of the donkeys that carried people down to the bottom. As we grumblingly watched our steps, we envied the people who rode the animals down, for the weather was

¹Matthew 26:39

hot. The sun was beating down. It was one hundred-fourteen degrees in the shade. Then, we saw a train of donkeys carrying people. We thought twice about depending upon animals under us and the straps and harnesses that were the only things between us and a one thousand foot fall. But, we also marveled at the way those animals could pick their way down the trail. The riders did not have control. The animals knew where they were going.

We Christians are sure-footed. We know where we are going: nobody needs to control or steer us. We are on the path of life with God as our destination. We are on the path of a life of the service of God and the world around us. No glitter or false dreams can sway us from that path.

The donkey is a beast of burden. It carries loads for its owner and sometimes pulls a plow. We Christians are beasts of burden. We carry loads for our master. We carry the burdens others have given us to carry in faith and trust. This does not mean we blindly or dumbly serve with no thoughts to our own needs. A donkey will stop when the sun is too hot, its burden too heavy, or when it is hungry. Being able to share our burdens with others does not mean a denial of our own needs.

A beast of burden is obedient to its master and in turn is fed, sheltered, and sustained by him. Jesus was obedient to his master God and was sustained by God. We, as supporters of Jesus, are also obedient to our master, God. In return for our obedience, we are fed, sheltered, and sustained by God. I have not yet met a Christian who took up the burden of his or her master who did not have enough shelter or sustenance.

A donkey is a beast with a lot of strength. It is amazing the strength we find we have when carrying the load our master gives us. This is not the strength of an armed or wealthy group of people. It is the quiet inner strength that carries us through times of doubt, pain, and hardship. It is the strength of numbers where fellow Christians walk together in Christian love and support. We will find the strength we need to carry our load. Our faith will give us strength.

Another image of the donkey is the definition "fool." In a sense, we are that too. There are arguments against the church, Christianity and faith. Perhaps you have had to listen to them. "Why are you so stupid that you give money to the church? All you're doing is paying for a building we don't need and a preacher who leaches off others' incomes. Anyone who would believe in Jesus must be a fool. There is nothing stupider than to turn the other cheek. Then you have two black and blue cheeks instead of one. The only way to live in this world is to get ahead, gather up all the wealth and comfort you can, and be comfortable in your old age. Even that time on Sunday morning you could be spending on trips with your family, bringing them closer together, and teaching your kids to behave. You're a fool to go along with that Christianity junk."

I'm proud to say I'm a donkey: a fool for God. I know the happiness of not having to keep up with other people. I receive tremendous meaning out of life by working with others in Jesus' name. I can be a fool for God and feel God's love. That love is more dependable than the love of social-climbing people.

The money that pays for this building also pays for a community center, a symbol to the community, and a building that is open to groups that seek to knit this community together. It provides a minister who is available not only to members, but to the community for counseling and comfort when needed.

I am a fool who wants to see life more valuable and meaningful for humanity. I am a fool who wants people to know they are loved and cared for by God, and by Christian people. There is fulfillment, richness, and a peace made possible by being a fool for God. Sometimes, fools help people laugh and have meaning in their own lives.

We are called to be donkeys: patient, surefooted, peaceful, big-eared beasts on which Jesus rides into the world. Do you have the strength to carry him? You have a choice. You can be donkeys, people of God, or you can be just like other people, never knowing the joy of being a servant.

When Jesus sent his disciples after the animal that first Palm Sunday, he said: "If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'" The Lord has need of you for his triumphal entry into the world. What will you say?