

I'm married to a cat lady. Yeah, you know the type. I don't have to explain. Well, a cat lady...except with donkeys.

We live in Bethphage, my wife and I, a small village about half way from Bethany to Jerusalem. It's on the east side of the Mount of Olives, not far from the mountain top.<sup>1</sup>

Not rich, not poor, we're as normal as normal can be. We own a small shop that sells firewood for camping to pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. Our most valuable possession, however, a donkey... kind of an older donkey, and her foal.<sup>2</sup> It's nearly weaned, never been ridden, and still follows its mother around. Yes, I'm irritated, at my wife. Wean it, break it, and the colt is worth more. But my wife...it's like...it's her precious child. She *treats it* like a precious child. Won't let me train it. Won't even let me touch it. Donkey lady.

We make extra money by renting out the donkey to those who are fatigued from walking up the Mount of Olives. And it would double if I could rent out that colt! Traffic has increased due to a, well, let's just say these are exciting, and dangerous, times. Weeks ago, less than three miles from here in the village of Bethany, Lazarus was raised from the dead. By Jesus. I mean, I don't know, it's the story, and you don't go making things up like that. Lots of people hope to see Lazarus, and you know, verify what happened to him. It's a pretty big deal. He was dead for days. Four, I'm pretty sure. So that's the exciting part. The dangerous? I've heard some of the travelers are looking for ways to kill Lazarus... eliminate any trace of Jesus' ability to raise people from the dead. It's just what I've heard.

Now, it's the Sunday before Passover. Already a steady stream of people on the road through our village coming from the countryside to Jerusalem to celebrate. The "donkey lady" and I are outside, preparing to paint some lamb's blood above the doorframe and on either side. We've got our hyssop branches to use as paint brushes. This is not a required part of modern Passover activities, but we like the reminder of the Passover story from Exodus.

We hear a noise behind us, turn around, two men untying our donkey and the foal. Stealing! In broad daylight! "Hey!" I shout.

They freeze. Just stare.

<sup>1</sup> The exact location of Bethphage is not known.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 21:2

“What are you doing?!” I can’t believe how brazen, I mean, “Who do you think you are, right there, right in front our eyes,” I’m getting amped, I’m a strong guy, I chop wood for a living. This is not happening, no sir, not today...

One of them says, his voice was so soft, “The Lord *needs* it. He will send it back soon.”<sup>3</sup>

It’s like an angel has closed my mouth. I can’t say anything. I look at donkey lady, and she looks at me. We just nod our heads. The men walk away with our most valuable possessions...her precious baby.

A little while later, we hear a shout in the distance, toward Bethany. Then, a crowd comes into view. Heading straight toward us. We can hardly believe our eyes.

Some guy is leading our donkey. Behind him, another man rides on the colt. Robes draped over the colt like blankets, and he’s sitting on top.<sup>4</sup> We expect the colt to bolt toward us, to its home, to its manger, to feed. But the colt stays calm, follows its mother. Passes us and heads toward Jerusalem.

A huge crowd follows the donkeys. I want an explanation. I pull this man aside. He’s reluctant to stop and lose his place, so I walk alongside. He tells me the man on the colt is Jesus. Behind him, his apostles and Lazarus. Then the crowds of people. Some are the ones from Jerusalem who went to verify Lazarus is alive. Some are Passover pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem, many look like they are from Galilee. Others are local, from Bethany.

I walk to donkey lady, who is smiling from ear to ear, by the way.

I point, “It is the Lord, it’s Jesus.”

She beams, “He...*needs*...our donkey.”

It’s like a punch to the gut. Can this be The Messiah? The Lord who created the Universe, *needs* something? He *needs* something that *we* can give him. Ordinary people, a “donkey lady” and her husband...meeting the Lord’s need?

I race to catch up with my donkeys, with Jesus. I reach him just as he crests the Mount of Olives and comes to a stop. The noise of the crowd washes over and down the west side of the Mount of Olives. The uproar crashes into the Kidron Valley and onto the east side of the Temple Mount, echoing back to the Mount of Olives. Over an area so large, hundreds of acres with thousands of campfires smoke like pots of incense, fires of sacrifice. The sun behind us reflects off of the golden Temple in front of us, through the smoke of more fires of sacrifice.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 11:3

<sup>4</sup> Mark 11:7

Jesus rides down the west side of the Mount of Olives, people throw palm branches on the path in front of him. Some throw their cloaks on the ground. The crowds near Jesus are delirious with joy.

Some of us know and some of us don't, but Jesus is fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiah and Zechariah of the King of Israel entering Jerusalem. And our unriden colt is a critical piece of the prophecy.<sup>5</sup> Jesus *needed* our colt to fulfill prophecy.

The people around the fires in the huge valley look up at Jesus, they see him as their king, their Messiah, they cheer, chant verses from the Scriptures.

"Hosanna!"

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

"Blessed is the King of Israel."

"Hosanna to the Son of David."

Jesus goes down the steep path, the sound of the thousands of people... it's overwhelming. Some of the Pharisees at the front of the crowd are furious. They know the crowd is acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah. They rebuke Jesus, try to get him to quiet the crowd. With a look on his face, I can only describe as sublime, he says, "If the crowd is made to be quiet, the very stones on the ground will shout out."

The triumphant crowd approaches Jerusalem. Jesus steps down from the donkey foal, and quietly tells one of his apostles, "Take it back to its owner." I hear him. I step up. I take my two donkeys. Jesus smiles, says four words to me. "You met my *need*."

Oh! Why is my wife not with me! WHAT. A. MOMENT. And I'm going to have to go back and try to recreate it for her.

I start back to the house, and the crowd stops. Jesus sits on the ground. I'm pretty certain he's crying, I only hear a few tearful words, a lament over Jerusalem and then I'm swallowed up by the crowd.

I reach home. Hug my wife. She is the reason we were able to meet the Lord's need! And I tell her that. I tell donkey lady she was right to keep the colt unriden.

We keep track of Jesus over the next several weeks. It's hard to do. Not because of lack of information, but because it is hard to tell truth from fiction.

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 62:11, Zech. 9:9

For the first week, Jesus teaches at the temple every day. Always in conflict with the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders finally have enough. They arrest Jesus and arrange for the Romans to execute him. Crucifixion.

The body of Jesus disappears. The Jewish leaders say that his apostles stole the body. The rumor among the people is that Jesus rose from the dead.

Then, reports that Jesus is seen by hundreds of people, not just his followers.<sup>6</sup> He is seen in Jerusalem, then Galilee.

It's been about seven weeks since Jesus rode our donkey. We have decided to keep the colt. To never let it be ridden again. My wife still treats it like a precious child.

For seven Sundays, I lead the colt to the top of the Mount of Olives. I relive in detail every moment of the day we met the need of Jesus. When I come to the top of the mountain I just stand there. Remembering the fires, the shouts, the palm leaves on the path. I return home with a feeling of disappointment. For six Sundays.

But on this seventh Sunday...in the distance is a group of men.

I take the colt and we go. As we get close, I see it's Jesus! With his apostles. I am only about a stone's throw away, and Jesus starts...starts...starts rising in the air. He goes into the clouds and disappears.

I walk toward the apostles and there are two men in dazzling white clothes approaching. "Galileans, why are you standing there looking into the sky. This same Jesus will return in the same way he went into heaven."<sup>7</sup>

The apostles break out in praise and happiness. They smile at me, they remember the colt, at least I think they do. Then they head to Jerusalem.

I return home. With the colt. To my wife.

"He's gone now. Really gone," and I tell her the story of Jesus rising in the air.

She doesn't even seem surprised. "We were willing to meet his need, and many people were blessed."

That makes me feel better, but I am sad that Jesus is gone.

"Now, we will meet the needs of his followers." She says.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:6

<sup>7</sup> Acts 1:11

I'm so glad I married a donkey lady.

Jesus says when we help others in his name, we are helping him...meeting his need. Meeting the need of the Lord God of the Universe."