



making God's love visible in downtown Memphis

No Experience Necessary to Carry Jesus into the City
Palm Sunday
Sunday, March 28, 2021
The Rev. Paul McLain

'You will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden.' In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

One day, I got a phone call from James, the guy who mowed my yard. He asked if he could come by the office to see me that day. I said, 'Sure.' After I hung up the phone, it occurred to me that I must have forgotten to pay him for the last time he mowed. I checked my wallet to make sure I had enough cash to cover it. James came by and I reached for my pocketbook. He said, 'Paul, put that away. You're up to date with me. I want to talk to you about something else.'

James told me that God had planted a vision in his heart. He felt called to create an outreach mission center to provide food and clothing for those in need, as well as offer Bible studies during the week. No such center existed in our rural county at that time, and he sensed that God wanted him to start one. There was humility and a little bit of trembling in his voice as he shared this vision. James knew this would be the biggest undertaking of his life. He was taking a huge risk to do something for which he had no experience, something he had never done before.

Did you notice that the colt or donkey that carried Jesus into Jerusalem also had no experience? Jesus had arranged things in advance to ride this particular colt, who had never before been ridden.

In part, this was to fulfill the prophecy in Zechariah of the new king riding in on a donkey, a sign of a peaceful procession unlike the show of military force Pilate was displaying in his procession on the other side of town. Part of the ceremony surrounding a king signaling peace was riding a colt that had never seen battle, that had never even been ridden.

But I wonder if Jesus was also saying something else by selecting this inexperienced colt to carry him into the city. Jesus did not go to the experienced religious leaders of his day to find his disciples. Instead, he sought out women, fishermen, tax collectors, zealots, lepers, and the blind.

Inexperience was the exact quality he was seeking to do something that had never before been done, to create a very different kind of kingdom. A kingdom not of might or domination, but a kingdom of the heart. The colt that had never been ridden could offer that gift of inexperience and naivete, the ability to carry Jesus into the city to help him and us see it through new eyes. The colt offered another gift. He offered Jesus his back.

James, the man who mowed my yard, could no longer offer anyone his back, at least not physically. At one time, James had a good job working construction. But he severely injured his back and became disabled. He then did whatever light work he could to make a living. He began mowing yards including mine. James was a hard worker who carefully paid attention to the smallest details. Despite his injury and his chronic pain, he never complained. He saw each day as a gift from God, and each task as an outward act of inner faith. James proved he could be trusted with the little things, in part because he saw them as big things. Now he was being trusted with a really big thing.

He knew that he had no experience in starting an outreach ministry center from scratch, so he visited similar centers in other counties to learn what worked well and what mistakes to avoid. He knew he had no experience in running a non-profit organization, so he sought counsel and training from those who had. He went about each of these tasks just as meticulously as he mowed my yard.

To him, each little step along the way was a step of faith. He ran into a number of obstacles, including jealousy from church leaders who thought he was setting up a competing ministry. Despite setbacks, he never deterred from the vision given to him by God.

A year later marked the grand opening of the Doers of the Word Outreach Mission Center. That Thanksgiving, they hosted a dinner for anyone who wanted to come, and they delivered turkeys and all the trimmings to shut-ins throughout the county. Over time, the church leaders who thought James was a competitor began to see him as a partner. In fact, they did more than that. They recognized his gift of quiet, faithful leadership, and affirmed God's call of James to be a pastor. He invited me to his ordination. Then Ruthie and I were honored when The Reverend James Pittman agreed to officiate our wedding.

We have stayed in touch with him over the years. He is still preaching every Sunday, and every weekday, he is still working diligently at the outreach mission center. He has found a new and different way to put his back into the service of Jesus and others.

Like the colt, he was untied and freed - to see a new vision, to take a big risk, and to live out a new hope. Like the colt, he discovered that no experience is necessary to carry Jesus into the city.
Amen.