

**“A Talking Donkey”**  
**Sermon for Sunday, May 27, 2018**

**There are those stories in the Bible that are just so good and so unique** that we must tell them and yet, too often, they do not get preached frequently. Our scripture lesson this morning is one of those. It involves a talking donkey that saw God’s will more clearly than an actual prophet! Before we jump in to reading the text, we need to spend a moment setting the stage for this story about our donkey, which is actually part of a longer narrative.

**We are in the Old Testament. Moses is finally leading God’s people (after a forty year journey) into the Promised Land.** But as this huge nation approaches the Jordan River, the King Balak from the neighboring kingdom of Moab has heard reports of how the Israelites have been defeating other kingdoms on their way to where God is leading them and he fears for his nation. So this King of Moab decides to hire Balaam, a professional prophet, who has a reputation for effectively cursing people to their demise. The king hires Balaam to curse the Israelites. Twice God tells Balaam not to accompany the King’s messengers and not to curse God’s people, but a third time God appears to Balaam and tells him he can go with the king’s messengers as requested, but only to do what he has been told. That’s where our lesson this morning picks up...

**SCRIPTURE: Numbers 22:21-34** (“The word of God for the people of God...”)

**So how did it end?** Although the king wants Israel cursed, four times Balaam speaks of God’s blessing on his people and the king gives up.

**Like so much of scripture, there are many layers of meaning and therefore many lessons from this story.**

- We could reflect on how God’s people sat completely in the background of this story unaware of what was going on. God was at work on their behalf in ways they did not realize. Is that ever our story?
- Or maybe we could think about how we are sometimes like the king. We judge people, who are not like us—even when God is bringing them into our midst—and struggle to wish God’s blessings for them.
- A rich story! Do you see how many-layered the meaning of a story can have for our lives?

**But I thought this morning we would talk a little bit about a talking donkey.**

I mean seriously... how can anyone believe a book that tells about a donkey who can talk?

Well I suppose a God who can create sun, moon and stars...

a God who can part the Red Sea...

a God who can walk on water and raise Lazarus from the dead...

can probably empower a donkey to share a thing or two!

We want to remember that the Bible is a faith story intended to teach us about God... about us... about God's relationship with us.

It is a book of faith, not veterinary science.

So what is the faith lesson for us today... from a talking donkey?

**We discover that God can communicate in unlikely ways... sometimes through unlikely people.**

Listen to what Balaam said to the king's messengers when they tried to bribe him into doing what the king desired:

*"Even if [the king] gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small beyond the command of the LORD my God."*

*(Numbers 22:18)*

We must remember that Balaam was not part of God's chosen people entering the Promised Land. He was not an Israelite. We do not know how he came to know God, but we do know that he had faith in God. He spoke a word of blessing on God's people. He witnessed about God's goodness to a king! I want to be careful about who I deem as "inside" or "outside" the grace and knowledge of Almighty God.

And I want to always be watching and listening to others.

God just may be trying to teach me something... teach us something.

If we open our eyes and open our ears, we may hear God communicating with us in some unlikely places!

**We might also learn that with God sometimes things are not the way they seem.**

This sweet donkey could see something that Balaam could not.

She saw the angel of God in the road and turned off into the field.

But Balaam couldn't see it.

She saw the angel of God in the narrow way and moved close to the wall.

All Balaam knew was she was scraping his foot against the wall.

She saw the angel blocking the way and finally just lay down.

Balaam could not see what was going on.

He was angry. He was frustrated. He was impatient because things were not going his way!

God was at work in the lives of his people in ways they did not know.  
God is at work in our lives... in this church... sometimes in ways that we can see.  
Sometimes silently behind the scenes.

**The Weaver (Benjamin Malacia Franklin)**

My life is but a weaving between my God and me;  
I cannot choose the colors, He worketh steadily.

Oft times he weaves in sorrow and I in foolish pride,  
Forget he sees the upper and I the underside.

The dark threads are as needful in the skillful weaver's hands,  
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.

Not til the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly,  
Will God unroll the canvas and explain the reasons why.

A talking donkey? Why not?

Let us pray.

+++++++=

Benediction (from Numbers)

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Amen.`