

## “Borrowed”

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*<sup>1</sup>When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, [Jesus] sent two of his disciples <sup>2</sup>and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” <sup>4</sup>They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, <sup>5</sup>some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” <sup>6</sup>They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. <sup>7</sup>Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.*

*<sup>8</sup>Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup>Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting: “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! <sup>10</sup>Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”*

*<sup>11</sup>Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. (Mark 11: 1-11)*

One morning an old man walked into the kitchen. Finding his son at the breakfast table, the father asked if he might be able to borrow his newspaper. The son scoffed. “Dad,” he said, “This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nobody reads newspapers anymore. Use this instead.” He handed his iPad over to his father. “Whatever you need, you will find it in there.”

At first, the father was a little offended. But, much to his surprise, he discovered that his son was absolutely right. That spider never knew what hit him.

My point is that the act of borrowing something involves risk. When you borrow something, you are taking on responsibility for loss or damage to what you have borrowed. If you lend something to another, you are taking the risk that the borrower may not be as reliable as you think or hope that they are. Borrowing involves risk.

It also involves trust. If we are thinking about lending something to another person, and we care about getting that thing back in decent condition, we probably ask ourselves, “Is this person reliable?” “Do they have good sense?” Let me put it this way. There is a reason that banks require collateral when we borrow money. The reason is that they do not trust us. They want our business, and they might even like us a little, but they are not just going to trust us with their money. The bank wants to ensure that, if we flake out or mess up, they are covered on the back end.

Which brings us to the strange loan that took place on that first Palm Sunday. On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus asks two of his disciples to run up ahead to the next village, look for a colt, and take it. Anticipating that someone might ask them what in the world they think they are doing, Jesus gives the disciples what must have seemed to them like a lame and inadequate explanation: “Just tell them your friend needs it... but not to worry... you’ll bring it right back.” Miraculously, it works. It was a risk, but I guess the disciples seemed trustworthy enough, and the caretakers of the colt let them take it.



It seems like a strange detail. Granted, this is a big moment in the story of Jesus. For most of his ministry, his eyes have been focused on Jerusalem. He knew that there he would face his final and greatest test – confronting the scribes and Pharisees who had been plotting and scheming to get rid of him once and for all. The momentous day had finally come – so why spend so much time and effort explaining how he got a ride into town? It seems like a minor detail, but all four gospels include it. So, it must mean something. The evangelists want us to know and understand that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed colt. What do we make of that? What are we meant to learn from this?

One thing we could say is that this detail shows just how humble and understated his so-called “triumphal entry” was. Compared to the way that kings in the ancient world usually entered into their capitals surrounded by huge parades of wealth, pomp, and circumstance, there was nothing triumphant about Jesus slowly lumbering in on a common farm animal. The fact that it was a borrowed farm animal just deepened the irony.

Some would say that borrowing something is not much better than begging for it. One thing is for sure: it sends a very different message than having the resources to buy that thing outright. Just think of the guy whose life hasn’t turned out so well, and he is kind of ashamed of that. So, on the afternoon of the class reunion he goes out and rents a fancy imported car so that all his classmates can see him rolling up in style. He cannot afford to buy such a car, but he can borrow it for a day, and maybe that will be enough to win the respect and admiration he is craving.

The difference here was that Jesus was not craving that kind of respect or attention. If he was, he would have asked his disciples to borrow a chariot, or maybe a couch he lay upon as he was carried into the city. Instead, Jesus borrows the humblest form of transportation he could find, one that was just a hair above walking. Notably, the gospels do not hide this detail, as if it were something to be ashamed about. Instead, they lead with it. It is something they really want us to know. As I read the story, there seem to be four key details Mark wants us to know about Jesus’ ride into town:

- (1) that as he approached, people waved palm branches and threw them on the ground before him, which was a traditional way to greet a triumphant king;
- (2) that the people hailed him as the heir of David, who was Israel’s greatest king;
- (3) that the people also cried “Hosanna,” a term of adoration, reverence, and praise, and called him the “Blessed One of God”; and
- (4) that he rode in to town on a busted, borrowed colt.

Do you all remember that recurring bit on Sesame Street, when they would show four different objects, and then sing:

*“One of these things is not like the others; One of these things just doesn’t belong.  
Can ya tell which thing is not like the other, Before I finish my song?”*

It’s pretty easy to tell which thing is not like the others in this story. Three things have to do with triumphant kings and conquering heroes; the fourth thing suggests a peasant from nowhere. For the gospel writers, the whole point is that these four things do belong together, and that the one detail that seems like it does not belong is actually the most important thing. It changes and informs the whole picture -- and that is what announces to the world that this king will not be anything like the others.

It is clear that we, as readers and hearers of this story, are being encouraged to think differently about the borrowed nature of this ride. The world may see borrowing as

evidence of weakness and , but in this story it is associated with strength. We can see the negatives in borrowing, but are there some positives as well?

When I think about borrowing, one of the things that comes to my mind is not a thing at all. What comes to my mind are neighbors. I remember borrowing a cup of sugar from Mrs. Cleve, the sweet and thoughtful widow who lived next-door to us in Wilmington when the girls were little. I remember the Barnhills in Rocky Mount, who let us borrow a car while ours was in the shop. There is something about borrowing from a friend or neighbor that solidifies and deepens our connection with them, strengthening the ties that bind, and reminding us that we are all in this together.

One of the times when we affirm this reality is at weddings, as loving relationships take a bold step into something greater. Call it superstition or tradition or just “better safe than sorry,” but many couples adhere to the custom of bringing certain things with them down the aisle. The original Victorian version was “*Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue, and a sixpence in her shoe.*” Why, we might ask, does this old wedding tradition include “Something Borrowed”?

Perhaps because it feels right, and good, and comforting to have with you -- on your person as you take your vows -- something tangible that belongs to someone else... something that has been joyfully loaned to you by a beloved family member or friend for this special occasion. The hope is that the object will serve as a symbol of the positive bond we have with the lender, and as a talisman that might carry and transfer their love and best wishes into our own marriage.<sup>1</sup> When we remember that the item is there with us, we also remember that a beloved person is with us, too.

I believe that is also part of the lesson of the borrowed colt. Scoffers might dismiss the borrowed colt as a sign of poverty or weakness or failure. What kind of king, they say, rides in on a borrowed beast of burden? But this particular king was not about what could be conquered or owned in a worldly sense. Christ was about what could be shared among neighbors. And that is what this act of borrowing was about – it was actually an act of sharing. Those men in Bethany did not know Jesus or his disciples, and they had to have been triggered by what seemed like an attempted theft of their colt. Even so, in an instant, an alarming situation became a calm one, suspicion was overcome by trust, and new people were added to the mystical community of love that Jesus had come to create. It was exactly what the lyricist Brian Wren would observe two thousand years later, when he wrote “*As Christ breaks bread and bids us share, each proud division ends. The love that made us makes us one, and strangers now are friends... and strangers now are friends.*”

Once we begin to see the priority of borrowing and sharing in the story of Jesus, it is almost impossible to miss it. If we think about it, Jesus was always borrowing things:

- He was born in a ***borrowed stable***, sharing the space with cattle and sheep.
- In one of his most famous miracles, he ***borrowed a little boy's lunch*** – five loaves and two fish -- and feeds 5,000 people with them.
- As a preacher and teacher, he ***borrowed boats*** all the time, crossing back and forth over the Sea of Galilee.
- He would teach his disciples to live the same way. As he sends them out, he tells them to “carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. You will neither buy nor rent places to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://danversport.com/weddings/blog/wedding-traditions-explained/>

stay, nor will you purchase meals to eat. Instead, you will live in ***borrowed bedrooms*** and get your bread from ***borrowed tables***.”<sup>2</sup>

As we descend into Holy Week, we will see how the borrowing becomes even more pronounced and ominous:

- Soon Jesus will gather in a ***borrowed room*** to share a final meal with his disciples. As he washes his hand in a ***borrowed bowl***, he warns that the person at the table who has dipped his hand into the same bowl will betray him.
- The next day, Jesus will be forced to carry and die upon a ***borrowed cross***, one that had been meant for a criminal named Barabbas, but was thrust upon him instead by a screaming crowd, jealous religious leaders, and a disinterested Roman governor.
- Even in death, his body would be laid in a ***borrowed tomb***<sup>3</sup> donated by Joseph of Arimathea.

His entire life -- from the moment of his birth to his burial after death -- was shaped by borrowing. But when Jesus borrowed something, he never kept it to himself. Every time he borrowed something, the circle of love grew. Every time he borrowed something, he changed the world for the better.

Can't you just imagine what it would have been like to let Jesus borrow something of yours? Can't you imagine how those lives were transformed...

those men from Bethany who let Jesus borrow their colt...

the innkeeper who let Mary and Joseph borrow his stable on a cold winter's night...

the little boy who watched as Jesus transformed his meager lunch into a meal for thousands...

the owner of a boat Jesus used as a pulpit for preaching and teaching...

the proprietors of the upper room where the sacrament was instituted, where Jesus washed feet and shared a final meal...

the criminal Barabbas, who watched an innocent man take his place on a cross...

or Joseph of Arimathea, the quiet but steadfast believer who gave his own tomb to hold the body of his Lord.

Can't we imagine how their lives would have been forever changed? No one could have seen it any clearer or known it any better -- that every time Christ borrowed something, he changed the world for the better.

As far as we know, Jesus never owned anything beyond the clothes on his back. He had nothing to lend, but somehow he was always giving -- giving of his time, his wisdom, his heart, his hope, his love. And in the end, he kept nothing to himself or for himself. He shared it all... gave it all away... his body, his soul, his divinity, his mortality, and ultimately, his life.

As I said before. It seems like such a minor detail in the story, going to all this trouble just to borrow an old farm horse. But it really is the only way to begin this story -- the beginning of the earthly end of a life that was defined by borrowing... a life meant to be shared... a life devoted to giving and receiving love. As we descend into the darkness of Holy Week, and look ahead to the dawn of Easter, how can we borrow from that life-giving story, and what can we lend to it, that might change the world for the better? ***Amen.***

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 10:3-7.

<sup>3</sup> <https://anabaptistworld.org/things-borrowed-a-donkey-a-room-a-tomb/>; [https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf20030c8/the\\_best\\_things\\_are\\_borrowed](https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf20030c8/the_best_things_are_borrowed); <https://gslcwi.com/something-borrowed/>