

**Westminster Presbyterian Church
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God's Economy of Grace Mark 11:6

When I made my renewal leave journey last Spring, I had the benefit of more than a year of careful planning. There was the building of an itinerary. There was the identification of the sites and archives to be visited. There was the never ending list of reservations for housing and transportation. But one of the great lessons of that experience was that no matter how much preparation had been done, it was never enough. Everywhere we went we were in need of someone's help. There was the archivist at Cambridge who broke the rules to let me see my ancestor's student records from 1589. In France a couple worked for us over several days to make an appointment to see the Protestant church in a village where an ancestor had been pastor. They did it because we knocked on their door and asked for help. In Germany a woman found us in the church cemetery and took us to meet cousins I did not know I had. Again and again we found that good planning was not enough. It took the hospitality of strangers to get us where we wanted to go.

We see the same dynamic at work in the 11th chapter of Mark's gospel. Jesus is preparing to make his final journey into Jerusalem. He sends his disciples to do some of the advance work. One of the tasks that Jesus delegates to the disciples is the procurement of a donkey on which he will ride into the city. He gives them specific instructions about finding a donkey but he does not send any money to purchase or rent the animal. Instead he tells them to inform the owner that their teacher has a need. They are to give the owner the opportunity to respond to Jesus' need by donating the use of the animal.

Jesus is teaching his disciples an important lesson about ministry and about life. They must learn how to depend on the hospitality of others. Luke makes a similar point when he describes Jesus' sending seventy disciples on the road to minister in his name. He tells them not to take money, extra clothes, or a backup pair of shoes. They are to be like lambs in the midst of wolves. Their vulnerability will become their strength as they learn to accept the gifts that others are prepared to make. They are to live by God's economy of grace which understands life as a process of giving and receiving. All of us live on both sides of that equation.

Of course the scary side of this economy of grace is that it puts us in a place where we are not in control. It is a place where we cannot predict what comes next. Westminster stands today at a particular point of need with the impending departure of a valued associate pastor. We do not know how this particular need will be met. Some of you will remember when Allison Lundeen resigned seven years ago. Some of us wondered if she could ever be replaced. Then a seminary student named Shelly White Wood appeared out of nowhere. The need of this church was met in a way that we had not imagined. It will be met again as we continue to trust in God's economy of grace.

Jesus used his final journey into Jerusalem to teach his disciples that the life they shared in him was not a project that they could plan or manage. It is a gift to be celebrated as it comes in ways we

least expect. The last thing the disciples expected was the depth of the self-giving love that took Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross. It is that love which opens the door to God's economy of grace.