

Don't Kick the Donkey

Numbers 22-24, Acts 9.1-9, Lk. 22.47-51

FUPC
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Sometimes, what feels like a defeat is actually a victory.

What seems like a failure is actually the prelude to success.

What appears to be a roadblock is actually a doorway to blessing.

When our plans don't go just like we want them to, we can respond in several ways:

1. We can force our will upon the circumstances, and get our way at all costs.
2. We can change our plans, accept the reality and go in a different direction.

It is the gift of wisdom to know when to persist, when to try harder, when to never give up. And it is the gift of wisdom to know when to back off, change course, make adjustments, and listen for the deeper meanings of why we have been stopped in our tracks.

Listen to the story of a man, a donkey, and an angel.

Barak – King of Moab, afraid of hordes of Israelites about to overrun his country

-He calls for a local prophet and fortune teller to call down curses.

-Balaam is hired for the job. God tells him not to go, but he goes anyway.

-On the way, riding his donkey, he is stopped, There is an invisible angel in his path that only the donkey can see.

First time, donkey turns off into a field.

Second time, donkey scrapes Balaam against a wall

Third time, donkey lays down and refuses to move

-Balaam is beside himself with anger and frustration. The donkey will not move, the journey is at a stand still. It appears to be sheer obstinacy and stubbornness on the donkey's part.

-Finally, the donkey speaks to him *“What have I done to you? Why have you beaten me three times? Balaam answered, “Because you are making a fool of me. If I had a sword, I would kill you!” The donkey replied, “Am I not the same donkey on which you have ridden all your life? Have I ever treated you like this before?”*

-At that moment, the angel becomes visible to Balaam! *“Why are you beating your donkey like this? I have come to bar your way because you should not be making this journey. But the donkey saw me and turned aside three times. If it hadn't, I would have killed you and spared the donkey.”*

-And Balaam makes a wise response, *“I have sinned. I did not know that you were standing in the road to oppose me; but now if you think it is wrong for me to go on, I will return home.”*

There are times in life when I've found myself beating the donkey because I couldn't see that it was an angel blocking my way. Had I gone forward, I might have regretted it, suffered for it, and caused others to suffer as well.

Sometimes, it is a gift to not always get our way.

Sometimes, it is a blessing to have our pathway blocked.

Sometimes, there is an angel watching out for us keeping us safe.

EX: 17 year old high schooler... driving to The Ledges State Park, Boone, IA
57 Mercury, hot car.

flying along at 80 mph

threw a rod, end of ride... disappointed friends

later found tie rod ready to break

Whenever there's an airplane tragedy, someone often talks about how they were supposed to have been on that plane and missed it because they were stuck in traffic.

There is a fine line between knowing when the opposition is God trying to show us another way by forcing us to back up, take a fresh look, and make new plans and when it is a challenge to our sense of persistence and courage to move forward.

I'm not saying that we should give up every time we hit a roadblock.

Some of the world's greatest discoveries occurred because a man or woman refused to give up when their pathway seemed blocked.

But roadblocks can be an invitation to stop, think, and consider the possibility that the roadblock might actually be an angel protecting us from ourselves, or pulling us in a direction that in the long run will be much better for us.

I'm glad that God didn't answer all my prayers the way I wanted him to.

Not getting the job I applied for

Having a loan application turned down

Being rejected by someone we love

All of these can be our donkeys that keep us from endangering ourselves in ways that we cannot see. And we can accept that there is a hidden mystery taking place and reasons why life is not working as we wish, or we can get off and beat the donkey and force it to go where it doesn't want to go.

EX: St. Paul... persecuting the early church.

Passionate for the Law and pure Judaism, Christianity was a "cult" and a "heresy" and deserved to be wiped out. He was on the journey to Damascus when he was stopped in his tracks by a light from heaven. A voice spoke to him... "Paul, why are you persecuting me?" It was the voice of Jesus. That was Paul's conversion moment. He was made blind, but his heart could finally see. He had been heading in the wrong direction. The angel in the road stopped him cold... and he became the greatest missionary the church has ever known.

Jesus, the night of his arrest. The soldiers came, led by Judas. He was betrayed with a kiss. Peter was there and was ready to fight. He grabbed a sword lopped off the ear of one of the soldiers. It was a chance for Jesus to escape in the confusion. Instead, Jesus healed the soldier and said, "No Peter. That's not my path. The Roman guard and even Judas was part of the plan. He did not kick the donkey. He knew it was time.

While no one would wish for an illness, there are people who discover in their pain the pathway to their greatest riches of soul and spirit.

While no one wishes for accidents to happen, there are people whose lives are transformed because of what's happened to them.

While it's hard to imagine good coming from pain in our lives, time and time again, God redeems the pain and transforms it into something precious and beautiful that we'd have missed otherwise.

Conclusion:

Are there any circumstances in your life right now that remind you of the donkey that refuses to move? You've made plans, you have visions, you are ready to move in a certain direction... and life just isn't cooperating with you? Maybe there's an angel up ahead protecting you from something you can't see.

When the donkey you're riding suddenly refuses to move, don't kick it. Get off and look around for the angel standing in the road. That donkey might just be saving your life.

Prayer:

God of wisdom, love and grace, we thank you for all the times you didn't answer our prayers, and saved us from ourselves. Help us to hold our plans with open hands, and to trust that you are watching over us with wisdom beyond our own. You can see what we cannot see. Forgive us when we insist on our own way and end up injuring ourselves and others. Let us know when to persist and not give up, and when to let go and look for new directions. In thanksgiving for your care, we offer this prayer. Amen.