

It's in the details: Luke 19:28-40; Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

by [M. Craig Barnes](#) in the [March 23, 2004](#) issue

Life is details—phones that keep ringing, e-mail that has to be returned, computers that crash, copy machines that jam, and children who are sick when we need to be at work. We struggle with the details of bodies that don't work as they should, with doctors, specialists, medical tests and pills. Our children juggle homework, athletics, orthodontists and piano lessons.

Then we all go to church on Sunday, and what do we find but more details? Worship is filled with hymns and prayers, sacraments and readings, stuff to memorize and stuff to confess. The word "liturgy" actually means "the work of the people," and our liturgy can seem like a lot of work.

Notice how Luke describes Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. We are given the exact location: the Jerusalem suburbs of Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives. Jesus then pulls two of his disciples aside. "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here." Jesus has clearly spent time preparing for this day. He knows exactly what type of colt he wants—one that had never been ridden. He knows exactly where the colt is. He's even worked out a response to the public relations problem of swiping a colt. "If anyone asks you . . . just say this, 'The Lord needs it.'"

Why is Jesus such a perfectionist? Why doesn't he just ask his disciples to find him a ride into town? Because Jesus is fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy of the long-awaited Messiah. "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9). Jesus is determined to get his arrival into town exactly right. And Luke is determined that we know every detail of the arrival of our new king.

We tend to think that spirituality means escaping the concern with detail. Spiritual people, we think, live simple lives. They don't worry about mortgages and dentist appointments and going to church committee meetings. They wear sandals, meditate and feed the birds. But that is not the biblical understanding of spirituality.

According to the Bible, the obstacle to our spirituality is not that we pay attention to the details of life, but that we pay too much attention to the wrong details.

There are a lot of details that Jesus ignored.

He didn't worry about the detail of urgency. Jesus was never in a hurry. On the way to Jairus's home to heal his dying daughter, he stopped to attend to a woman with a chronic illness. He could have hurried by her to get to the crisis, but he didn't. He was never a victim of the urgent demands of others.

He didn't worry about the detail of effectiveness. Remember the parable he told of the sower who threw his seed indiscriminately? Only some of it fell on good ground. Jesus expects us to be faithful, not effective. Only God gives the increase. Only God grants success.

Jesus didn't worry about the detail of recognition. Remember when Martha was slaving away in the kitchen while Mary listened to Jesus? Martha came storming out of the kitchen wanting Jesus to recognize her efforts as hostess. All Jesus had to do was give her a certificate saying, "Martha Is a Hard Worker." But he never did things like that. He only recognized people who remained anonymous, like the widow giving her offering.

He didn't worry about the detail of popularity. Remember how great a disappointment he was to the Pharisees who wanted him to take a harder stand on sinners? Or how great a disappointment he was to the agenda of the Zealots? Or to his own disciples? Most of all he was a disappointment because he kept pointing to the detail of life in the kingdom of God.

He didn't worry about the detail of tomorrow. Remember his words in the Sermon on the Mount? "Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to the span of your life? . . . So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today" (Matt. 6:27, 34).

Details that consume us never crossed Jesus' mind. And we easily overlook the details he was concerned about. Our souls are dried out because we have tried so hard to save ourselves by controlling the wrong details that we have no energy left for the detail of finding a savior.

When Jesus sat upon that young colt and began to ride into Jerusalem, some of the people around him were wise enough to recognize the moment of their salvation. They cut branches down and spread them on the ground in front of him. Many spread their cloaks on the ground. They began to shout, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven!"

The singing of psalms was a liturgical act repeated at every Passover and feast day. Every time the people worshiped, they worked through those psalms. Year after year, week after week, day after day they paid attention to the details of looking for a savior. And when the Savior came, some were ready.

We know the details of Palm Sunday, the Last Supper, Good Friday and Easter. We've gone through them year after year. Why do this again? For the same reason that we go through the details every Sunday. It's the only way we can take our eyes off the things that do not matter and set them upon the arrival of the Savior.

The best news is that once we've learned to look for Jesus, we'll find him in every detail of life.