

Summer Sermon Series: Animals of the Bible
The Donkey: All Ears
Numbers 22:21-32

August 5, 2018

First Reading ~ Numbers 22:21-32

The next morning Balaam got up, saddled his donkey, and left with the delegation for Moab. But God was very angry because Balaam was going, and God's angel stood in the middle of the road to bar the way. Balaam was riding on the donkey with two assistants accompanying him, one on either side. When the donkey saw the angel of YHWH standing in the road holding a sword, she turned off the road into a field. Balaam started beating the donkey to get her to go back onto the road. But the angel of God stood on that narrow path, which was between two vineyards with walls on each side. When the donkey saw the angel of God, she pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So Balaam beat the donkey again. Then the angel of God moved on ahead and stood in apace narrower yet, where there was no room to turn right or left. When the donkey saw the angel of God, she laid down under Balaam. This enraged Balaam, and he started beating the donkey severely. Then God opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, to make you beat me three times?" Balaam answered the donkey, "You made a fool out of me! Why, if I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you this instant!" But she said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden to this very day? Have I ever acted this way?" "No," Balaam replied. Then YHWH opened Balaam eyes, and he saw the angel of God standing in the road with a drawn sword. And Balaam bowed low and prostrated himself before the angel. The angel of God asked, "Why did you beat your donkey three times? I came here to bar your way, for your path is a reckless one before me! Three times your donkey saw me, and three times she turned away. In fact, if she had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now— though, I would have spared her!"

Second Reading ~ from Richard Rohr in "Let God Be God"

It takes a long time for us to allow God to be who God really is. Our natural egocentricity wants to make God into who we want God to be. The role of prophets and good theology is to *keep people free for God* and to *keep God free for people*. While there are some people who come to "see God" naturally and easily (Matthew 5:8), most of us need lots of help.

If God is always Mystery, then God is always in some way the unfamiliar, beyond what we're used to, beyond our comfort zone, beyond what we can explain or

understand. In the fourth century, St. Augustine said, "If you comprehend it, then it is not God." And yet, very often we want a God who reflects and even confirms our culture, our biases, our economic, and political systems and beliefs.

The First Commandment says that we're not supposed to make any graven images of God or worship them. At first glance, we may think this means only handmade likenesses of God. But it mostly refers to rigid images of God that we hold in our heads. God created human beings in God's own image, and we've returned the compliment, so to speak, by creating God in our image. In America, God looks like a white male, even though "God created humankind in God's own image; male and female God created them" (Genesis 1:27). Clearly God cannot be exclusively masculine or of any one race.

The human ego wants to keep things firmly in its grasp; so, we've created a God who fits into our small systems and our understanding of God. Thus, we've produced a God who requires expensive churches and robes, a God who likes to go to war just as much as we do, and a domineering God because we like to dominate. We've almost completely forgotten and ignored what Jesus revealed about the nature of the God he knew. If Jesus is the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15) then God is nothing like we expected.