

Sunday, November 27, 2022 – Advent I

Matthew 21:1-9 (ESV) – “David’s Righteous Branch = Jesus”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“And when they approached Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, and He said to them, 'Go into the village opposite you, and as soon as you enter into it you will find a colt tied, upon which no man has yet sat. Untie it and bring it. And if anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?", say, "The Lord needs it.," and immediately he will send it here.' So they went and found the colt tied by the door outside on the street, and they untied it. But some of those who stood there said to them, 'Why are you untying the colt?' And they spoke to them just as Jesus had told them, and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their clothing on it, and He sat on it. And many spread their clothing on the road, and others spread leafy branches they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed cried out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest!'" Thus far our text.

Have you ever had someone tell you a joke that wasn't very good at telling it? They get through all of the background, and set up the punch line and, oops, they forget it at the last minute. It's quite a letdown, isn't it? The same holds true for someone telling you a story, and at the last minute, when the climax of the story is at hand, they get

distracted, and start talking about something else. It's frustrating, isn't it? Or, have you ever stumbled into finding out about a surprise party being thrown in your honor BEFORE the party ever happens? When you actually get to the party, and the folks are all hiding behind furniture, or behind the curtains, or in the other room, with the doors closed and the lights off, it's very hard to act surprised, isn't it?

Well, this is the awkwardness of this narrative from St. Matthew's Gospel being told this Sunday. We're expecting to hear about the coming of Jesus in the manger of Bethlehem during the season of Advent; we're preparing our hearts to find Him there. We're expecting to start at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, instead of beyond the middle of the book. We know the things that go on at this time of the church year – hearing Isaiah foretell the coming of the Savior of the World that is born of a Virgin, Mary, and that He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Almighty God. We'll eventually get to that, both in the Sunday sermons, but more specifically in the special Midweek Advent Services.

Retailers have been getting us ready for Christmas for about a month already now (I couldn't believe it – the first of the Christmas commercials on TV was aired on Halloween night – I kid you not!). Of course, they aren't preparing us for the real Christmas – involving Christ – but rather for a money-spending spree that keeps them in business. But, our Gospel text doesn't even mention mangers or Bethlehem or angels or even shepherds. It wouldn't make a good Sunday School Christmas program! Rather, the appointed Gospel for this day talks about the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, on Palm Sunday, less than a week before His crucifixion, death and resurrection. Doesn't it seem like we're skipping ahead just a little bit?! We haven't even talked about Him

being born yet; how could He be on the way to dying already? Bear with me, and we'll find out together why this text is so important to hear today, after getting into the details just a little bit more.

You see, the chief and only reason that Jesus came to earth at all was to die. Boy, we don't want to hear that, do we? We don't want to think about the fact that our sins, and the glories of all mankind, were the reason that He lowered Himself from the glories of heaven to come and dwell with us, and be our Savior. He was ensconced in the blissful and complete presence of God in heaven, at the seat of power and authority at the Right Hand of the Father. Why would He want to come down to this earth, and live amidst the pain and suffering that have been here ever since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? It is the sin of Adam and Eve, passed on through the generations to us, that caused the love of God to compel Jesus to come here and dwell with us.

But, we're used to hearing about a cute, cuddly baby in the manger – we love little babies, don't we? When you're at the shopping mall, or walking through the park, the quickest way to stop pedestrian traffic, and cause people to act silly, is to go there with a little baby. I was amazed at this when Julia was small – everyone wanted to get a peek at the baby, and make google-eyes at her, and listen to her coo and even cry. Babies are attractive to us – we think that they are sinless, I think, and also remind us of a simpler time in our lives, when our only worry was food and love from our parents. We also focus on them to avoid talking about the fact that we're getting older, and with old age comes death and the unknown, which we don't want to dwell on – but, this is the subject for another sermon!

That's why Christmas is a much easier "sell", if you will, to the unbelieving world that we live in. It's easier to talk about a baby in a manger than a Savior crucified and dying on the tree of the cross. In just a short time, we progress from talking about the wonderful good news of the Savior being born to Him dying for the sins of the world. It shows just what happens when He grows up and starts preaching the truth that the only way to salvation is through faith in Him. The world around us, including us, doesn't want to hear that there is only ONE way to be saved. In our multi-cultural and pan-religious society, we want to think that whatever we believe is o.k., as long as we are fervent in that belief. This is the same as saying that whatever is true for you is just fine, and whatever is true for me is just fine, too. That's the way that our modern society has perverted the truth of the Gospel – into moral relativism and universalism.

While we might think that the beginning of the season of Advent is the time to focus on Bethlehem, the truth of the matter is that the crux of Christianity is at Calvary's holy mountain. It wouldn't solve any part of our "sin problem" if Jesus came and dwelled with us, and didn't die and rise again for us – the atonement for our sins wouldn't have been satisfied. The only way for salvation to come, for sins to be forgiven, is for there to be a death, a shedding of blood. See the Old Testament sacrifices and prophecies if this is something new to you. Jesus came to die – this is hard to believe with a baby in a manger, but it was foretold from of old. His shed blood would later come to us by the working of the Holy Spirit in the blood of the Sacrament of the Altar. The fact that He died in our place, and rose again on the Third Day, is the reason that we can rejoice in His coming. Otherwise, we would rightly fear it – He is holy, we are not. Only because He came in humility and by setting aside some of His divine powers were

the shepherds and even Mary and Joseph able to approach Him and not be immediately destroyed because of their own sins and sinfulness.

Specifically, in our text, the events that unfolded on that Palm Sunday are rich with Old Testament prophesy being fulfilled. Jesus prepared the way for His entry, just as it was foretold from of old. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets told us that He would come in humility, that He would ride on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. When a conquering hero, or a king, came into a city, he came with horses pulling the great chariot that he was riding in, making a parade of sorts, that no one could miss, reminding them that he was a royal ruler, and that they were the common people, who owed obedience to him. On the other hand, here comes Jesus, riding not in a chariot, not pulled by horses, but rather on a donkey, a beast of burden, a symbol of a working-class existence.

This was the way of Jesus, the way of servanthood, humbleness and love. He could have come with all the angels attending Him, in pomp and authority and power. But, this wouldn't have been in accordance with why He came to earth in the first place. What kind of king is born in a stable, instead of in a palace? What kind of a king lives out in the desert, in the lonely places, rather than in the capital city of Jerusalem? What kind of a king allows Himself to be crucified, and killed like a common criminal, rather than exerting all of His power to prevent such an injustice? Jesus came to serve and to humble Himself, and be killed and rise again, so that the sins of the entire world could be placed upon Himself. He was fully man so that He could die, and not be immortal, as God is. He was fully God, so that His death and resurrection would count for the rest of us; indeed, for all mankind. If a normal man dies, there is no effect except upon himself.

But because Jesus was and is God, His death and resurrection affects each and every one of us.

But, we see some glimpses of Jesus' power, in small ways, coming to the fore in this text. He foretold that the owners of the donkey would let it go upon the words being spoken, "The Lord needs it." It doesn't seem like this would be too convincing in other circumstances, does it? But with God's power and foreknowledge, anything is indeed possible. Even though He was coming on a donkey, the people spread blankets on the ground, and spread leafy branches on the ground, to make the road smoother for Him, to show that they honored His coming, and didn't want the dirt of the road to get on Him or the donkey that was carrying Him. We know that these same people would turn on Him in a matter of days. But, for the time being, He allowed them to see some of His greatness, that He was the Son of God, coming triumphantly into the great city of Jerusalem, as had been foretold from ages before.

At the opening of this season of Advent, which means "coming", the Holy Spirit works within us to prepare us for the Christ to come and dwell among us. Specifically, He prepares us to understand the reason why Jesus had to come in the first place – because our sins are so great, that it was the only way to save us from them. There was no other way, except for God to come to us when we could not come to Him, to do the entire work of salvation in our stead, and die and rise again to ensure that each and every one of us wouldn't die when this earth comes to an end, but would rather live forever in heaven, in the perfect presence of God, which was the original plan that God had for us when He created us in the Garden of Eden.

But, rather than just focusing on Him coming as a baby, the folks that set up the lectionary for this new hymnal in the church remind us that He didn't just come to live on earth, and experience everything that we deal with. Rather, He came to die. He came to be crucified, a horrible death reserved for the worst of criminals, and rise again, because it was what was necessary. The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem reminds us of the conquering hero that He truly is, while at the same time keeping in mind that He is the humble servant of us all, totally because of His love for us. This narrative, even though we might think so in our sinful human thinking, is not out of place at this time of the year.

Even though we don't want to think about the cute, cuddly baby in the manger growing up and being despised and rejected by those He came to save from their sins, that's exactly what happened. We need to keep the work of Christ on the cross as the number one action in our minds when we think of Jesus. This perspective reminds us of our complete and utter sinfulness that caused Him to come, but also of His boundless love that drove Him there, kept Him there, and motivated the Father to send Him there in the first place. Thanks be to God for loving us so much that he did everything to restore us to Himself. Even though we are plagued with the results of the sin that clings to us like glue, including getting distracted from the main point of Jesus' earthly ministry, including thinking that our sins couldn't have been THAT bad, the Holy Spirit continues to refocus our attentions into the right place, the works of Christ on our behalf. He has truly done everything for our salvation. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.