

Sermon Advent 1 2020

November 29, 2020

Matthew 21:1-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read, especially these words, **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”**

The season of Advent, the coming Christ—as the word advent means a coming, or an arrival—looks at this Jesus coming to us. And we see Him as He is that Jesus who comes to save us. You see that’s what those words mean, “Hosanna” means save us now. And this is said to this One who comes to those people then.

Of course, this is a curious thing, isn’t it? As I’m always making the point, where is God? He is omnipresent, as we say it theologically. He’s everywhere, right? So, how can this God who is everywhere come to be somewhere? How can this God who is everywhere have a “location,” so to speak? And what does it mean, then, that He would come to His people?

In a sense that’s what the season of Advent is all about. I’m pretty sure I say this every year, but, remember that Advent is this spot in the Church year where we have one eye at the Lord’s coming again at the end of time, especially like we talked about last week, and the other is on coming for us at the first Christmas. In other words, we could say that this is one eye on His coming to be judged for sin, and another on His coming to bring the judgment against sin in this world. That’s one sense, I think that’s one we can understand about His coming.

The other sense is that this is actually a mystery. How can the God who is everywhere be somewhere specific? We can’t define it per se. We can understand that it happens, for example, we know that this Jesus is God with us, He’s Immanuel, but how does God come to us in the flesh of man like that? Like always, I have to give that very technical answer of “I don’t know.”

In view of that mystery, then, come back to those words, **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”** Blessed is this Jesus, this One who comes in the Name of the Lord, those words that we say every Divine Service, as we say the Sanctus, the Holy, Holy, Holy; calling upon this One who comes

to us in His very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. But lest we get ahead of ourselves, let's look first at what this coming was about.

When we look at Jesus' preaching something I think we always want to jump over is His message when He first starts preaching. Do you remember what He says when He comes on the scene? In language that reflects this coming to us, He says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That's from this Gospel of Matthew itself. Jesus is baptized, He goes out into the wilderness, then He comes back and starts preaching, and Matthew says that's what He preached. He said, "**Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.**"

Now there are three things noteworthy about this. The first is that word for "at hand." That's the same word you have when Jesus draws near to Jerusalem in the first verse of our Gospel Lesson today. Just as Jesus draws near to Jerusalem here, so also the Kingdom of Heaven draws near. In particular, it draws near in Him.

The second thing is that call to repentance. Now, as I say that, that's a word we use a lot. We talk about things like Luther's first thesis in the Ninety-Five Theses. Do you all remember what that one says? It says, "*When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said to do penance [or more properly we could say repent], He meant that the entire life of a Christian should be one of repentance.*" So, what does that mean then? Well, as Lutherans we say that this means two things: contrition and faith. In other words, it means that you need to have sorrow for your sins. You need to recognize how devastating your sin is before God, how it disrupts your ability to stand near to Him—or as I was reading Luther on this passage He said that it means that you can't come to Him. Right? Because of your sin and how corrupting and awful it is, you can't come to God. No. Instead, He has to come to you. But this sorrow over your sin has to come first. Second, faith. Second, you have to trust that this sin is forgiven by that blessed blood of this God made flesh for you. You have to trust that this Jesus who entered into your flesh did so to take upon Himself your sinfulness and your brokenness coming that you would be redeemed.

The third thing is that this call to repentance is why He came. As He says in Luke, "**I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.**" This is His why He has come, for that call. When He comes, this is a part of it.

But think about why else He says that He comes. He says earlier in this Gospel from Matthew why He has come. He has come not to be served, but to serve and

give His life as a ransom for the many. We think about kings and royalty, and as they go from place to place, they have attendants serving them, giving them care for their every need. But as we look at this Jesus, is that the point? No. Look at how He came at His birth. He came in this lowly farm animal trough. He was born and laid in a manger. He wasn't laid in a comfy bed, but straw. He wasn't clothed in rich fibers, but in swaddling cloths. He came this way to show the world His role. He wasn't coming for the comforts of the wealthy. Look even at what the prophecy from Zechariah said in the lesson this morning: **“Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.”** He wasn't coming to receive the honor of other people taking care of His needs. No. He was coming to serve us in dying for our sins. He came to die for us, for you.

He also says it another way: **“The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”** As I said that about Luther making that point that we can't be the ones who come to God, this only hammers it in place that much more. If you've ever been lost, or thought you were, I'm sure you can relate. Thankfully, as an adult I've not been too horribly lost. I've been unable to find a location I was trying to get to and have had to ask for directions, but wasn't lost in the sense that I didn't know where I was, just more wasn't sure where the goal was. I also haven't gotten lost when doing something like hiking. I've gotten off trail and thought of how scary it would be to be really in the middle of nowhere and get totally lost and not be able to find your way. And think about how that goes sometimes. You hear those stories on the news about hikers who get lost and they send the search teams to find them. They have, sometimes, helicopters, and people on foot, and maybe even things like sniffing dogs. And then when they find them, there is much rejoicing.

You see, your Lord knows that's your state in this broken and fallen world. You are lost, and so He has come. He has come to seek and to save you. He has come to serve you by dying for your sin. He has come to call you to repentance that you would trust, not in your goodness, but in Him and His mercy for you.

And how has He come? Well, we look at this coming at the first Christmas, and obviously, we'll look even more at that in the weeks ahead. But we also look at what that life was, how He came to this world and redeemed it. This One coming in the Name of the Lord, who rode into Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday to ride to His death, but the One who had come into this world, born into it that first Christmas. We see that coming.

But we talked about this God coming now, being in a place now. What's that look like? How does He come now? He comes to you where He promises to. You know that's something I say with some regularity, but we have to deal with Jesus not according to what He can do, but according to what He promises to do. And think about what that means with this location of Jesus. We deal with Him where He promises to be, not wherever He can be. So, where is He? Everywhere. But where does He come to you now to call you to repentance, to serve you and give His life to you, to seek you and save you. Right here. He comes to you in this Word that's preached to you. He comes to you in His body and blood. He came to you in baptism.

In all of this you know that He has come *to you*. Again, looking at Luther on this, he made the point that this faith that this brings is not just a knowledge that Jesus has done this, not just a trust that He's done it, but a trust that He's done this *for you*. Your baptism, the preaching, the Lord's Supper, the absolution. Those tell you that He's done it for you.

Then call on Him where He promises to be. Call on Him with that word, "Hosanna, in the highest." Save us now, Lord. Save us from suffering. Save us from coronavirus. Save us from broken lives and broken relationships. Save us from divisions and discord. Save us from violence and terror. Save us from all sorrows and sadness. And He will. He will because He has come to save you from your sin. All of that comes from the very sin that He came to die for. And as He comes to you now, He tells you all of this is dealt with. Not just for the world, but for you. And as He says that, know then, that means for you. Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, for you as He comes. **Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest!** Amen.