

Wednesday in Advent I
Kramer Chapel CTS

5 December 2007
Fort Wayne, IN

+Jesu Juva+

Behold Your King is Coming to You
Matthew 21:1-11

Advent is a liturgical speed bump that slows us down lest we rush headlong into Christmas like a herd of swine. Let it be known to all the grinchers out there who would steal Advent: Advent is not simply an annoying prelude to Christmas created by liturgical purists to rob you of premature Christmas carols and burden you with violet shaded Lenten-like midweek services. Or if you are little more liturgically up to date, to make your Christmas blue. It is Advent that points us to the reason for Christmas. Thus it is a good and salutary thing that the traditional Gospel for the First Sunday in Advent is Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Palm Sunday is not misplaced in this opening week of the Church Year.

There was a used book store a few blocks from the church I served neared the University of Minnesota campus run by a man who was something of a cranky contrarian whose cynicism was especially evident in early December as he would put a sign in the front window of his shop: "Put the X back in X-Mass." Well that's what Advent does-it puts the X, that is, the cross, back in Christmas.

Jesus goes to Jerusalem to embrace the cross. That is the reason for His coming. He takes on flesh and blood to suffer and to die. A donkey becomes His vehicle of choice. He sends His disciples to fetch a donkey and colt. He is not stealing; He is not taking something that doesn't belong to Him. This donkey and all beasts belong to Him. He is their Creator and Lord. Now the Lord will have use of it for His purpose. He does it says Matthew to fulfill what the prophet said: "Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on the colt, the foal of a beast of burden."

Carried on His way to Calvary, Jesus comes says Luther as a "beggar king." He doesn't look like much of a king. There is no royal diadem. There is no weaponry of war. No courtly pomp and costly ceremony. No regal banners announce His approach. There is only an excited crowd making a spectacle waving branches, paving His way with their overcoats and crying out their chants of hosanna and blessing to the One who comes in the name of the Lord. There is not much to see, but then faith does not rely on what is seen but what is heard. The eye can be deceptive.

Your king is coming to you. That is the trajectory of the Gospel. It is not about our ascent to God but His drawing near to us. It is not about a God up there in the heights of heaven or in the depths of your spirituality. Advent announces that it is Emmanuel who comes. God is with us that He might be for us even to the point of death on the cross.

He comes to be your King not in the way that kingships go with power to oppress but in the humility of a servant who bends down to lift you up. Such a King is this Son of David. He comes to you when you could not come to Him. He comes to claim you for Himself with His own blood the price of purchase. He comes to annex your life from the dominion of death that you might be “be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessed.” He comes to be King for you, right here where you live and die. He humbled Himself to sleep in Bethlehem’s manger and hang bleeding on Golgotha’s cross. He comes to us Luther retorted to Erasmus even in the sewer, making even of that sacred space by His name and promise.

In a few minutes we’ll sing Paul Gerhardt’s great hymn that poses the abiding question of Advent: “O Lord, how shall I meet You, how welcome you aright?” And how shall we meet Him, how welcome Him aright? We receive Him by faith, trusting in His merciful words as He comes to us with His body and blood. See your King comes to you, no longer on a lowly donkey but with in His Word and with His body and blood hidden under bread and the wine. He comes to take away your shame. He comes to restore you to the joy of His salvation. *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”* Amen.

Prof. John T. Pless