

December 3, 2017
First Sunday in Advent

“The Correct Parade”

Mark 1:1-11

Today we begin Advent. “Advent” means “coming” or “arriving”. Advent is not just about the arrival of Jesus into the world in Bethlehem that first Christmas. It is about His coming again on the Last Day and it is about His coming to you continually in your Holy Baptism, in the Lord’s Supper and in His Gospel Word of forgiveness.

So I guess the powers that be in the church felt that highlighting Mark’s account of the famous *arrival* of Jesus in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday would be a good way of kicking off Advent. On that day there were several groups of people around Jesus watching Him.

You had the disciples, faithful followers of Christ who believed He was the Son of God. You have the crowds who are thinking He is the Messiah who has raised four-day dead Lazarus, destined to be king of Israel, although they really don’t appreciate what this really means. You’ve got the leaders of the Jews who have thoroughly rejected Jesus and desire His destruction. And you’ve got the Romans and probably a bunch of Jews too who are just busy with other things and couldn’t care less about Christ and are wondering what all the fuss is about.

But as this parade goes on for hours winding its way to the temple, I’m betting all these people are asking more or less the same question: “This Jesus guy, what is he going to do?” There has to be great anticipation in this crowd, and I have to imagine it grows as Jesus approaches the temple mount.

Although Jesus has come to Jerusalem before, it has never been like this. He’s like a rock star, kind of an anti-establishment populist, He’s been healing and casting out demons for months and just the other day He raised the dead! The crowds love Him! And now He enters the capitol city in the way prophesied by Zechariah: *“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

And so, yeah, the people rejoice as this Jesus draws closer to the Temple of God, *“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”* And I think things may have reached a fever pitch as Jesus comes to the end of the parade, dismounts, enters the temple and the next verse following our text mightily proclaims that... *“when He had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.”* (Thump head on pulpit.)

He just left. What was that all about? Welcome to life, people. Not just life, to Christian life.

I’ve seen it in a lot of folks and in a lot of different ways. I’ve even gone through it a couple times myself. Something is going on in our life and we’re looking to Jesus to do something spectacular to us or with us or through us, something that will change our life and maybe even justify our faith in Him. We expect something “Wow” and then, it just doesn’t materialize.

I worry about this with our National Youth Gathering. We put 25,000 teenagers together in a stadium with a rocking praise band, powerful emotional Christian testimonies on large screens, heart-wrenching skits, light shows and more. The youth get charged up on Christ, eager to go into the world and be and do Jesus! Then what happens? High school, and come Sunday, Divine Service, Setting One...again.

It may be somehow boldly stepping out in your career, sure Jesus will bless things, but it becomes a humdrum struggle. Or you're sure you're going to be the best Christian mom or dad you can be for Jesus...but as the kids grow up they just don't cooperate and that Christian love becomes frustration and anger. Or maybe its facing financial or physical affliction but you're just sure Jesus is going to do something great to save your bacon. But the bills just keep coming, or it's just more chemo, more sickness, more loss.

Why does Palm Sunday end the way it does? Because that wasn't the parade Jesus came to have. It's true, Jesus deserves all the cheers and praises given, but not for the reasons they give it. Even the twelve thought Jesus had come to make life in Israel great. He didn't.

Why does Jesus do nothing at the temple? Because there is nothing there. His work isn't there. Sure, God used to work there in the ceremonies and sacrifices, but that covenant depended on people remaining faithful to God, and they couldn't. The promise of a good earthly life for Israel died with that old covenant.

The parade that matters happened five days later, as Jesus marched away from the temple and city, tortured and beaten, amid the wails and lamentations of the crowd. The Advent, the arrival that makes all the difference in heaven and earth for you and me is His arrival at the cross of Calvary. His victory was death to this world, and resurrection to life beyond it forever. This is the victory we have been given by Him. Not victory in business or family or health or happiness. Not even a perfect faith while you draw breath in this life.

The Advent of Christ in Bethlehem, in Jerusalem, in the Word, water, bread, wine, on the Last Day is the Advent of the promise of God fulfilled—being saved from the sin and death of a fallen world. The Advent of Christ means your resurrection from the dead.

I thought it important we remind ourselves of this as we enter our culture's Christmas season, which in large part is focused on happiness in the world—the parties, the food, the presents, the family gatherings and such. In a lot of ways we turn this season into a parade of sorts, celebrating the good life we have now for many, for others a lamenting of how good we think things should be and maybe someday will be.

But the Advent of Jesus in that manger was never intended to correct a life broken by sin and make the Fall of Adam and Eve...not too bad. He doesn't bring the good life now. He brings life everlasting! He brings resurrection! This is far, far better, and we can't let the world lead us to believe otherwise! Our resurrection is reason for joy! Our resurrection is reason for hope!

If you don't get this, you're at the wrong parade. You're cheering Jesus to do something at the temple. You're looking for a salvation where sin still resides. You're looking toward a covenant that's broken, a place where God hasn't promised blessing, a life that has no future. The temple, it's been in ruins for nearly 2000 years. There's nothing there for you.

Trust in the procession of Jesus to Calvary...for you. Look three days beyond it to Jesus resurrection...for you. This is where God's promise is found. This is where God's promise is fulfilled. This is where your salvation is certain! This is real life, forever life—yours!

The Advent of Christ is the advent of your eternal life, free of sin, death and Satan. Don't be expecting something less. Earthly blessings are nice. Parties, banquets, family and presents are nice. Healthy and prosperity are nice and we certainly should asks for such wonderful gifts from God in this life. But Christ's coming then, now and the day to come, is not about bringing such things. It's about bringing forgiveness, salvation and life. It's about His trip to the cross and through the grave. Put your hope and faith here, and there alone.

Amen.