

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Matthew 21:1-9

Behold, your King is coming to you!

“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” (Zechariah 9:9). And our inclination to flee crosses and seek glories cries out, “What? Are you serious? This is my King? No crown, no cape, no throne, no red carpet or herald? Why, I am more impressive than He! I have more than He does! Where’s the carriage, the calvary, the troops, the treasure?” But His only Calvary is the one He has set His face on; He alone the sole soldier and the treasure. This all seems backwards to us, as tends to be the case with Jesus and His message, but here He is, your King, on a rental donkey with fishermen at His side, like Superman riding up to save a damsel in distress in a beat up rental Geo Metro with a couple good-old-boys.

Just as courage is a virtue only possible for those who experience fear but overcome it, so also humility is a virtue only possible for those who have grounds for pride but do not flaunt them. Jesus could’ve borrowed Elijah’s chariot of fire and led angels in His train, but He’s not here for His glory; He’s here for ours. He’s not here to show off, but to save. This Beggar-Kings poverty is your riches. He goes without what we take for granted to grant us what often we don’t even realize how much we truly need. Let our ears open our eyes today as we listen to the crowd get it right, *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*

Whoever will not receive this Beggar will not have Him as King. Jesus enters Jerusalem in the same way He enters our hearts: through humble means, and whether a donkey or a wafer, the world at large is hardly wooed by His chosen vessels. But the world’s eyes have not been opened by ears fed the Faith. Luther writes about this temptation that we all face to lose sight of Christ’s glory in His simplicity:

The rejection of Christ does not happen only with the Jews, but also among us, for the high and mighty scorn us because of our gospel and sacraments. What folly, they say, that I should let myself be baptized with water poured on my head, supposedly to be saved thereby; or that some poor parish preacher, barely able to put a coat on his back, should pronounce forgiveness and absolve me from my sins; or that by receiving bread and wine in the Sacrament I should be saved... Why doesn’t our Lord God send us a fine pulpit-prince to preach to us? Him we would believe... The prevailing word is, Huh, if all you can do is preach about Christ and faith, I’m fed up with that already, I’ve heard it all many times before.

Times change, people don’t. Still we mistake Jesus’ gentleness for weakness, irrelevance, or foolishness. We want frills: transitory riches, not eternal; cup holders, not a cup of blessing which He’s blessed; the fading glory of the dying, not the everlasting glory of the dead. We hunger and thirst, like the 5,000, more for bread and wine than Body and Blood. Our stomachs growl more loudly than our souls.

Christ came, not to woo us, but to win us; not to set us free to sin, but from sin. He came to conquer, not the trifles of each day that often so consume us, but eternal death and hell. But, ungrateful and unimpressed, we too are often tempted to strangle the life out of this meek and

humble Servant-Lord, to mock the very tenderness that put our lives before His own, in order to remake our raggedy God in a more fashionable image.

“Wake up,” St. Paul pleads. *“The day is at hand, salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. Cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”* Are you awake and ready? How will Christ find you when He returns? Will you be like the colt on which our Lord rode, directed and guided by His wisdom through the Temple gates and to new life, or will you be like a stubborn donkey, pulled and dragged, kicking and complaining, into Judgment? Light doesn't ask for excuses; light exposes shame. You will have Jesus as Savior or Judge. There will be no time for questions and answers, for rationales and reasons. There will be judgment. Are you ready?

A little girl's brothers used to set traps to catch birds. The girl didn't like the traps, because she loved the birds. One day, a friend asked what she did about the traps her brothers set. “I pray the traps don't catch any birds,” she replied. “Is that all,” the friend asked. “No, I also pray God will keep the birds from going into the traps.” “Is that all,” the friend asked. “No, I also go and kick the traps to pieces.” St. Paul calls us to action. The day is at hand. Salvation is nearer than ever before. Don't simply talk. Pray, but don't simply pray. Do the smart thing. Wake up, put on the armor of light, and dash to pieces the traps of darkness that would keep you in slumber.

How do we know if a work is of darkness? Can you in good conscience ask Jesus to bless it? Are you comfortable sharing it with your friends, family, and pastor? For those of us in the Ministry, a blush is always, as the poker players call it, a “tell.” If a work isn't something Jesus can bless according to His Word, if we are tempted to hide it from anyone, if we feel even the slightest tinge of guilt or uncertainty, then we should think twice before stepping into a trap, especially since death and the Lord's return always loom so closely at hand.

Alfred Lord Tennyson, onetime Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom, was walking in a beautiful garden, when a companion asked him why he so often spoke of Jesus and what Jesus really meant to him. Tennyson thought about it, stopped, and pointed out a particularly beautiful flower. “What the sun is to that flower, Jesus Christ is to my soul.” He is the same for yours. Live in His light. Long for your King's return. Cast off the works of darkness as daily cast down your cloaks in welcome, taking up glad palm branches and the crowd's grateful cry of mouths opened by eyes that see this Beggar-King with the clarity of ears stuffed with the Faith. *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*

He may be riding a rental donkey, and His red carpet may be made of rags, but this Beggar brings you riches no man can buy and only a King can give. Don't read the book by its cover, read the cover by the book. The outward trappings are not to mislead, but to fulfill what God had promised all along. *“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.”* So rejoice. Your King comes. Receive Him, humble though His entrance may be. The world may see water, bread, wine, words on a page, or hot air from a preacher, but you, O Christian, shout hosanna to your King, for

sometimes humble vessels are chosen vessels, and humble but chosen vessels are what He sees as He now comes to you. Amen.