

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Mark 11:1-10 *Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples² and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it."³ If anyone says to you, "Why are you doing this?" say, "The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately."⁴ And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street, and they untied it.⁵ And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?"⁶ And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go.⁷ And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it.⁸ And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields.⁹ And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"*

Today is the first Sunday in Advent, a season which we often associate with Christmas, the time of year when we look forward to hearing about Jesus born in a manger, the cattle and the sheep surrounding him, the shepherds stooping in to see him, and so on. That's a part of Advent, but it's not the total picture. You see, the word Advent means "coming," so our focus is the coming of our King. And sure, we ponder His first coming at Christmas in Bethlehem some 2000 years ago, but *also* we examine how He still comes to us today, and how He will come again on the Last Day.

With that all being said, you might have wondered why our Sermon text is the Palm Sunday text, of all accounts to be focusing on this Christmas season. Wouldn't it make more sense to read about maybe an angel appearing to Zechariah or Mary? Why do we jump to the final week of Jesus' life? Well, this is a fitting text for today, the First Sunday in Advent, because we're focusing on Christ's coming.

You see, there's a common storytelling technique used in movies, I'm sure you've seen it before, where they open up the movie by showing you the last scene first. It's just a glimpse, totally out of context, usually pretty chaotic. Maybe there's an explosion, everyone's running around; as the viewer you have no idea what's going on. And then the scene goes dark, and the words pop up, "Two months earlier," or something of that nature. Then the rest of the movie shows you how we got there.

That's kind of what's going on here. We get a glimpse of Jesus on Palm Sunday, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, just five days before He would be arrested and beaten and crucified. How did we get there? Well, the story starts way back in a barn; there lies a baby in a feed trough, surrounded by his father, mother, shepherds, and the barn animals. The two scenes couldn't be more different, but from the second that baby was born, He began His walk toward the cross. From His first breath, the mission began to eventually end up riding into Jerusalem, soon after to die on the cross for our sins.

So, we see, these two scenes are really related, because they have the same focus. The stories surround the same individual with the same mission. On that Palm Sunday, when Jesus came into His city Jerusalem, He came to a city and people that would decide they did not want Him there, didn't need Him. It's just as when He first came into the world on Christmas; He came to a world and a people who did not want Him, didn't think they needed Him. And yet Christ came, born into the world, riding into Jerusalem, still coming to us today, and will come again, because He has that one focus of bringing you and me to heaven.

As His redeemed children, let's not turn Him away as so many have in the past and still do today, but rather we can sing, in the words of our theme:

Savior of the Nations, Come

I. He comes in power yet with humility

II. He comes in glory yet with mercy

Imagine you woke up one morning, showered, dressed, and grabbed a bite to eat on your way out to work—a totally ordinary morning. You climbed into the car, started it up, turned on the radio, and suddenly you heard the radio show host talking. He's saying something about how today is going to be a good day for you, although you're not quite sure who he's talking to. He says you'll have open roads all the way to work, your boss is going to give you an unexpected pay raise, and you're going to get to leave work early. You might hear that and think, "Wouldn't that be nice," but probably not give it a second thought. But what if on the way to work, the roads were extraordinarily wide open. You arrive at work and the boss calls you into his office to commend you for your hard work and gives you a pay raise. Then in the early afternoon, the office is told they can head home early today. Well, then you might start thinking about that radio host again, amazed that everything took place as he said!

That's essentially what Jesus did for our disciples in our text. He says, ***"Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. ³ If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'"*** And it all happens, exactly as Jesus described it.

We've read this account dozens of times, so we mostly just gloss over these details like they're no big deal. But in reality, it's shocking. Here Jesus tells His disciples everything that's going to happen to them today, even down to the words that a complete stranger would say to them, and it all happens! Now, the disciples really don't seem all that shocked either. Jesus tells them what to do, they say, "Ok," and they go and find everything like He says. That's it. There really doesn't seem to be much surprise over Jesus' words being totally accurate beforehand.

That's because the disciples understood one thing very well about Jesus. There was much they didn't quite understand yet, but one thing that they had witnessed time and again and had become completely convinced of was that Jesus had great power. He had power to heal the sick, to drive out demons, to calm the forces of nature, to read what was on their hearts and minds. So sure, if He had the power to do all of that without much effort, certainly it wouldn't come as a surprise if they found everything just as He had said.

Yes, Jesus had great power. He was master over life and death, master over the demons, master over nature itself. And as that great, powerful master-King, what sort of entrance does He take into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? Really not one befitting His power at all, at least in our estimation. He's not riding in on a stallion, not seated in a chariot. He's riding on a young donkey, here called a colt, elsewhere identified as the foal of a donkey. And it's not even *His* donkey! It's a borrowed pack animal, that He's going to have returned later. He's not even mounted on a proper saddle! The disciples simply threw their cloaks on the donkey's back, and He sat down. The result is that we see God Himself, coming with all power in heaven and on earth, yet coming with humility. Riding gently on a borrowed donkey, being carried into a city where He will be killed in a most inglorious way.

And He still comes to us similarly today! He comes to us to break Satan's hold on us, to obliterate sin's record against us, to slam shut the doors of hell and throw open the doors of heaven. And He does

this through very humble means: through Words, namely the Words of the Bible, and through visible means—not great wonders, but through water, wine, and bread—obviously I’m speaking of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Where these three are being used—Scripture, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper—God promises that the Holy Spirit is working behind the scenes, crucifying our old sinful flesh and raising us as new creations in Christ! But on the surface, it all looks very humble, maybe even unimportant.

And sometimes, the temptation exists for us to be dissatisfied with that. Rather than simply preaching the Word which God promises ***“shall not return to [Him] empty, but it shall accomplish that which [He] purpose[s], and shall succeed in the thing for which [He] sent it,”*** (Isaiah 55:11) we long for something new. We long for the flair. There might be times where we sit through the service bored of hearing the same message again and again. It’s tempting to think that simply hearing God’s Word and being baptized into God’s family isn’t enough, it’s up to me to make some dramatic declaration of accepting Jesus as my Savior! Sometimes, we might be tempted to think that if we’d just try something different, then we could really grow this church! Just preaching God’s Word isn’t enough, we have to try to bait people in somehow; there must be a better way!

And yet Jesus, the powerful Lord of the universe, entered Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey. He came into the world by being born in a barn, laid in a manger—the most humble of beginnings. And again, it’s with that same humility that He comes today—through Word, through water, through bread, through wine. All of which God uses to bring us to heaven. Through which He assures us we have been forgiven, through which He daily reassures us that His sacrifice was enough even for our worst sins, through which He strengthens our faith and prepares us for heaven. So, as Jesus comes today, He comes with all power and yet with humility. And when He comes again on the Last Day, He’ll come in all glory and yet with mercy.

In our Old Testament reading, the prophet Isaiah was pleading with God to come down and deliver Israel from its enemies. But he doesn’t just want God to simply come, he pleads with God to come in a spectacular display of His glory! Listen to Isaiah’s words: ***“Rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make Your name known to Your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at Your presence!”*** (Isaiah 64:1-2) He wants God to come in an explosion of glory, so that the whole world sees His unparalleled perfection and tremble at its presence.

However, a few verses later, he has to ask the question, ***“In our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?”*** It’s almost as if Isaiah is considering that unbearable glory of God’s coming, and then starts to consider his own standing before that powerful God. This is the effect of seeing God’s glory, of realizing just how perfect our Lord is. When that perfect God says, ***“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy,”*** (Leviticus 19:2) that makes you take a step back and realize just how far you’ve fallen short of God’s expectations.

You know, this is the season of angel visitations, since at this time of year we often hear about Gabriel and other angels appearing to Mary, to the shepherds, to Zechariah, and to Joseph. And every single time, one of the first words out of the angels’ mouths is “Fear not,” “Do not be afraid.” That’s because the only reaction a sinful person like us can have when standing in the presence of holiness is all-consuming terror. When you’re standing before the holy God, the result is that you just feel naked; completely exposed in your sinfulness.

And Christ will come again, and it will be a glorious display of His holiness. It won't be the same scene as that Palm Sunday, Jesus riding in humbly on a donkey. Rather, it will be as Jesus describes it in Matthew 24: ***"Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."*** (Matthew 24:30) The world will weep in fear as it sees the God they have ignored for so long finally coming. But what about us? How could our reaction be anything other than Isaiah's, ***"In our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?"***

And yet in Jesus, we see a great contrast. Just as He comes to us today with all power and yet with humility, so on the Last Day He will come in all glory and yet with mercy. In the last two verses of our text, we read, ***"And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, '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!'"*** That word Hosanna, which we're all so familiar with—it has a special meaning. We often think of it just as a praise word like "alleluia." But what Hosanna actually means is, "Save us, we pray." The people who were shouting it on that first Palm Sunday were almost certainly shouting it with thoughts of, "Save us from the Roman government and occupying army." They were misinformed about the type of salvation the Messiah would bring, but they *did* need saving.

Because they along with us, could not hope to stand before the Lord. During God's glorious return, they along with us and everyone else could do nothing but weep in abject fear and terror. For we all deserve to be that brushwood that Isaiah spoke about—dry, dead wood bursting into flame before the Lord. And so we cry out, "Hosanna!" "Lord, save us, we pray!" And that is exactly why Jesus came. He came with all power, He will come again with all glory. And yet He comes with mercy, not giving us the end that we deserve, but giving us new life. He comes to save. He came that first time as a baby born in a manger in order to free us from death. And He will come again a second time to free us from the grasping claw of this world. The effect is that now we can say, as Paul does in our Epistle reading, ***"[We] wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain us to the end, quiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** (1 Corinthians 1:8)

Now, I said at the beginning that one fairly common plot device used in movies is when they show you the final scene first, and then use the rest of the movie to show us how we arrived there. Another very common plot device is the use of foreshadowing. That's when we see something now, and it's a clue of what's yet to come.

Well, Christ's first coming—God being born in human flesh, struggling through life as one of us, dying in the most horrific way, but then rising from the dead—that's foreshadowing. Christ coming to us today, not just through His Word but also offering us as individuals new life and His forgiveness in Baptism and the Lord's Supper—that's foreshadowing as well. It's all foreshadowing what will happen when Jesus returns again. It will be with all power and glory, and yet He will come with mercy. He will come to save you who need Him so desperately. So we can look forward to Christ's return, and as the angels always pleaded, we need not fear. For it is God's good pleasure to have mercy on you and me. Therefore we can sing, ***"Savior of the Nations, Come."***

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

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