



The First Sunday in Advent

November 29, 2020

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Matthew 21:1-9

CHRIST'S KINGDOM COMES TO YOU!



Christ's Kingdom Comes to You! Do you believe that? You know, when a human king takes up his rule, he makes certain that not one soul misses it in his kingdom. He rules in an outward way so that no one can oppose his rule in his kingdom. And if someone does oppose it, then the king takes action against

the insubordinate subject. That's really what an earthly kingdom is all about, isn't it? It's about establishing a rule so that his reign is never in doubt.

As an example, consider a type of Christ. Solomon was the son of David, the great king of Israel. David had established the kingdom of Israel through war and bloodshed. Now, as you know, David had many wives and many children, and the heir to the throne was contested by several people. Absalom tried to steal it from David before his father even died! And then, when David clearly appointed Solomon as his successor, one of David's other sons, Adonijah, tried to steal it from Solomon. So, what did David do? He had Solomon ride into Jerusalem on the king's mule, and sit in the king's throne, while all the people of Jerusalem shouted, "**Long Live King Solomon!**" (1 Ki 1:39). You see, the whole point was that there would be no doubt as to who was king next. Everything happened in an outward sense, so that to human eyes there was no mistaking who the king was and whom the people were to serve. David, and Solomon after him, went to great lengths to establish their rule in an earthly kingdom.

Dear friends, today we begin a new church year, and we want to consider how Christ establishes his

kingdom among us. While Solomon riding on a mule of David was a type of Christ, what we see Jesus do is entirely different when he establishes his kingdom among us. Last week, you may recall we briefly talked about the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven. We recalled Luther's explanation to the second petition of the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism, where he teaches that "**God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word....**" Christ's kingdom is established not by the bloodshed of his enemies or through earthly wars. His kingdom is established not through a show of force or building a massive palace or citadel which he can defend against an earthly army. No, Christ's kingdom is established through the gospel. It comes to us when the gospel is proclaimed.

So, what does this have to do with Palm Sunday? Why focus on this on the first Sunday of the church year? Listen to the prophecy that is fulfilled by Jesus as he rides into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey on the first Palm Sunday: "**This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet [Zechariah]: Tell the daughter of Zion: Look, your King comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey**" (5). Jesus came to establish his kingdom on Palm Sunday, but it was not with an invasion. That day, his kingdom came *to you*, the prophet said. How did it come to you? I didn't hear Jesus making an announcement or preaching in our text. He simply rode in on a donkey. What does that have to do with his kingdom? Well, what do we preach when we proclaim the gospel? We proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection. Isn't that what we've come here today to do? Isn't that what we mean

when we say that we are a Christ-centered church with Christ-centered worship? Isn't that why a cross hangs in the front of our sanctuary, and why an altar is the center piece of our worship space? All these things focus us on Christ's death, because as Paul says, "*We preach Christ crucified.*" That is the center of our message.

And yes, it's the center of our message even in Advent, and even through Christmas. Do you ever tend to separate the manger from the cross in your mind? As you begin this week to prepare for a Christmas celebration, are you preparing for Jesus' outward arrival and all the pageantry that goes along with it in our Christmas celebration without considering the real focus of Christ's incarnation in the first place? You see, it's easy as we prepare for Christmas by desiring the baby Jesus in a manger, cute and cuddly, but neglecting the fact that his incarnation meant taking on human flesh and blood so that he could shed that blood and offer that flesh on the altar of the cross for your sins and mine. And why does that matter so much? Why should the manger of Jesus always be viewed through the cross of Jesus? Because if Jesus had not shed his blood for you on the cross, if he had not come to Jerusalem to establish his spiritual kingdom through his death winning your forgiveness, then his birth means nothing at all. And if he had not fulfilled that gospel by dying on the cross, then our proclamation of it means nothing as well.

Why celebrate Palm Sunday on this first Sunday of the church year? Because the cross is the center of everything Christ came to do. It is how he established his kingdom. It is how he forgives your sins. It is how he defeated his enemies and how he comes to you. You see, as we look at our lives, today and any other time of year, we come to the same conclusion: we desperately need help and rescue from our sins. Our plea should be the same as that of the people who followed Jesus on that first Palm Sunday, "*Hosanna to the Son of David!*" (9). That was not a well-wishing to Jesus, it was an earnest plea for help. It was a cry for God's mercy, whether the people understood that or not. It was a request for forgiveness. It was a plea that means, "*Save us, please, Son of David!*" Without God's help, we are lost. But that's why Jesus came to Jerusalem. He came to you. He came to forgive your sin. And he

did that by dying on the cross.

See, **Christ's Kingdom Comes to You!** He comes to you in Word and Sacrament, and that Word is filled up, it's fulfilled, if you will, by Jesus' death on the cross. It's the reason he came in the flesh that first Christmas, and it's the reason he went willingly to the cross as he rode into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday. Without this most central act of his death and resurrection, Christ's kingdom cannot be established, and his kingdom cannot come to you. It would be worthless. But as we settle in to prepare for yet another Christmas, we settle in preparing for Christ's death. We settle in to see Christ's kingdom established, not by shedding the blood of others, but by shedding his own blood for us. Then his enemies are defeated and subjected to him. Then he establishes his rule over all things, having redeemed the whole world to God. That's what Christ came for.

And now, he comes to you. He comes to you to proclaim that good news to you in the gospel. He comes to speak that Word of forgiveness to you, making you his dear child in the waters of baptism, feeding you with the nourishment in the Supper where we feed on the very flesh he gave and the very blood he shed for forgiveness. What a joy to know that Christ established his kingdom by his death in Jerusalem, and now his kingdom comes to us in the proclamation of what he accomplished there.

It's not like any other earthly king you'll ever meet or read about or study about. Jesus is different. And, so too is his kingdom. What a joy and a privilege to study it yet again for another blessed church year. May God's kingdom also come to us in this place and at this time all church year long. Amen.

