

## Matthew 21:1-11

In Autumn the leaves change color from green to red, yellow, and orange. It's a delightful time of the year. We lose the Summer heat and humidity. Thanksgiving arrives. Christmas is just around the corner. In the church, also, the colors change. Green has decked the altar throughout the Summer months, but today a new color arrives: blue; the blue of Advent. It's a delightful time of the year. We sing Advent hymns. We put up the Advent wreath. We hear the well-loved Bible story of Jesus riding into Jerusalem amidst shouts of "Hosanna!" The crowds lay their cloaks on the road. They cut down palm branches and spread these on the road. What's not to love?

But apparently there is something. We're told that as this Advent procession is taking place, the whole city of Jerusalem is stirred up, and not in a positive way. The meaning here is that the people of the city are agitated. Who doesn't love a parade? They don't. They don't want to change the color to blue. They don't want to sing Advent hymns or put up an Advent wreath. They are creatures of habit, just like us. When our cats come into their room at night, if something is out of place, they are immediately on guard. They do not like change. But I think that we resist it even more so. The people of Jerusalem were not necessarily against Jesus. They even had to ask, "*Who is this?*" They were simply against this out-of-the-ordinary procession of someone, anyone, riding into their city.

When Advent comes, things change; and change has a way of stirring us up. One thing for me is this blue stole. I was used to wearing the green one for months. But now it's this blue stole which is cumbersome. I can never get it to hang straight around my neck. For all of us, Advent means that John the Baptist is coming; and who wants to listen to him?! He's a fiery preacher of the Law. He doesn't mince his words; he gives it to us with both barrels.

No wonder the world skips over Advent. The people of the city - our own city and society - go straight from Thanksgiving to Christmas. The weeks in between these two holidays are nothing but a pre-Christmas season. When Jesus with His Advent procession is seen riding in on a donkey, the people in our Jerusalem, our city, ask, "Who is this?!" because they're stirred up, agitated. They do not want the changes which Advent brings: not blue or purple, but only a white Christmas; not John with his Law preaching; and certainly not Jesus on a donkey.

But something has to change. The people of our Jerusalem - our world, and we ourselves - are on a crash course. People are perishing one by one. People are sinners, even the nice ones; and sin leads to death. There is no escaping it. If nothing changes, death is forever.

But there's hope. This is what the blue of Advent signifies. It symbolizes hope; real hope, hope that is certain. This hope comes with Him who rides to us on a donkey.

There are two kinds of people, and we see both kinds in our Gospel reading for today. The one are those who join in with the Advent procession. "*Hosanna!*" they cry, "Save us now!" The other are those who become agitated. They do not welcome change. It irritates them to have to move away from their normal way of life.

Advent is a time of repentance; and repentance means *to change* - to change our mind, our will, our heart, our way of life. But we don't like change. We resist it. And so it's near impossible - so near, that it

is not possible - for someone who watches pornography now and then to change that habit. It's impossible for a child to start honoring and obeying father and mother when that child has had the opposite habit. It's impossible for a gossip to stop gossiping; for someone who is not very committed and faithful in church and Communion attendance to start being, and keep being faithful. It's impossible because we are not able to make these changes in our life. You and I simply cannot repent by our own power and will. We resist it.

And so when Jesus comes with the Advent procession, we join with the crowds in the city of Jerusalem who are stirred up and agitated. We don't like being preached to; being told to repent, to change. We, with the world, like Thanksgiving, and we like Christmas, but Advent we could do without.

But then we would have no hope, for Advent changes the color to blue - the "hope color." Unless we change, and turn from our sin, we lose the blue of Advent, and we will never, ever, have a truly white Christmas.

But this is why Jesus rides to us today. It is impossible for us to change, but with Him all things are possible. Jesus rides to us on the donkey of His Word, not to tell us to change, but to effect that change within us. Not by forcing and pressuring us; by loving us and forgiving us.

The first time He rode on a donkey, He was headed for a cross on Calvary. He went there to change places with you. Since you and I cannot escape our sin and the hold that death has on us, Jesus humbled Himself, letting your sin accuse Him, letting your death grab hold of Him. And now it's over; it's finished. The power of sin is done in. It's chains are broken. And death cannot claim you forever, for Jesus died for you and rose again.

This power over sin and death is not in the air around you. It's not even within you. This power is in your Baptism; it's in the Sacrament on the altar. These holy things are the donkey Jesus rides on to bring to you the blue color of hope. Baptism places you with that group who welcomes Jesus; who cries, "Hosanna!" What Advent demands, your Baptism gives. "Repent! Change!" Advent cries; and in returning to your Baptism daily, and coming up to receive the Sacrament, God changes you; He works repentance within you.

Did you ever play the game (actually it's more a determination of wills) where you stare at someone, and the first one to blink loses? This is where we were with God, in a staring contest, so to speak. And there is no way we could have won. But God blinked. In mercy He blinked. He saw our stubborn will, and He changed for us. He emptied Himself and took the role of a servant. He gave Himself up, and lost on the cross, to gain for you the victory.

If this kind of love does not change us, nothing will. But it does. You don't have to keep trying to outstare God; to battle against His will. He closed His eyes in death for you. He did this out of love for you. He forgives you completely. He does not hold your past against you. Wherever sin has overpowered you, and you gave in to it, Jesus forgives. This forgiveness makes your Advent blue. And not just Advent. Blue is always on your horizon. There is always hope for you because of Jesus. Amen.