

Matthew 21:1-11

The Missouri Tigers may have something similar to a “Messiah complex” after last night’s game. They rode into their “Jerusalem” (San Antonio, Texas) amid the screams of a happy throng. But the next day the shouting has come to an end; the happiness has faded; and the people have gone home. It was fun while it lasted, but the fun times are over.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, it was cause for celebration. The people lined His path with their clothing and with palm branches. They cried, “Hosanna!” Their King was riding on before them. But just a few days later their King was hanging from a cross—the fun times were over and the people went back to their lives.

We tend to exhibit the same behavior. Sunday morning we dress up for church, not just with clothing—we dress up our words and actions with niceties. We join the crowd to sing praises to Jesus. We cry our “Hosannas” and then we go home. The party is over. We came, we saw, we did our duty...we put in our offering and shook the preacher’s hand. But now our week really begins. Now we can get back to business as usual—work, school, shopping, cooking, and baking—the list goes on and on. Like that Palm Sunday crowd, we put in our time for Jesus; but now it’s time to go out the door and get back to work.

The challenge we have is putting Jesus in the present. We hear the stories of what He did in the past. We know He will come again in the future. But we don’t live in the past or in the future; we live in the present. The Mizzou Tigers lost their football game last night, but even if they had won; years and decades from now what meaning would that game hold? It would simply be a trophy on a shelf, the memory of a great season, the glory days of years gone by. Winning seasons come and go. Champions are made and then, the next year, they are defeated. Evil Knievel may have been a champion motorcycle stuntman, but now he is dead. Does our Christian faith follow the same pattern? We “get up” with the Palm Sunday crowd, but Monday morning, what happened in church becomes a thing of the past and it really doesn’t affect our lives all that much.

The people in Jerusalem simply didn’t understand too well what was going on, and perhaps at times, we don’t either. And so these words in our text are very helpful to us: “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘Behold your King is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey.’” These words were spoken in the past, but they are in the present tense. They do not say, “Your King came to you.” (Although He did.) They are not in the future tense, “Your King will come to you.” (Although He will.) The prophet’s words speak to us today—“To you, dear members of Christ Lutheran Church in Augusta, Missouri... To you, your King is coming right here and now!” That day in Jerusalem wasn’t just an exciting parade for the people who lived then—that day is today. We are the “Daughter of Zion,” God’s people. To us Christ comes. And their words then, are our words today: “Hosanna,” we sing with them, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!” We don’t sing these words before Holy Communion to remember what happened on Palm Sunday. We sing them because what happened then is happening to us today. Christ is coming to us! The donkey may look different—today it is bread and wine; but this donkey carries the very same Jesus who rode into Jerusalem 2,000 years ago.

Today is the First Sunday in Advent. Advent means “coming.” For most people the only Advent they think of, especially at this time of the year, is when Jesus came as a tiny baby

in Bethlehem. Without that Advent our faith would be meaningless. Unless Jesus had come in the flesh, we would have no Savior. But if that's all Advent means to us—kind of a pre-Christmas season—then Christ is, for us, only a thing of the past. “Christmas happened; that's wonderful...now let me get on with my life.” People like this, whose faith lives mainly in the past, typically come to church twice a year—Christmas and Easter, because they come only to remember and celebrate what happened on these days. Christ Jesus is, for them, a figure from the past.

But then you have those who come to church a little more often than just Christmas and Easter, but they come more out of a sense of duty than anything else, because they are thinking not just about the past, but especially about the future. Jesus' Second Advent will take place on the Last Day. This will be His final coming, and on that day the heavens and the earth will be destroyed, and everyone will be assigned their place in eternity. To avoid a place with the wicked, some out of fear, feel it is their duty to show up in God's House more than just twice a year. For them, Christ Jesus is a figure in the future and they don't want to hear words of judgment coming from His mouth, so they feel obligated to fill a pew now and then.

But for you, dear friends, who love to come to the House of the Lord; who come not out of obligation or out of fear, but because of Jesus' invitation and promise to be here with you—for you Christ is in the present tense. He who came for you as a baby, and who will come to take you home, comes to you now in His Word and Sacrament, and this is why you are regularly found in the House of God.

The people of Jerusalem came out that day for one reason—because Jesus was in their midst; He was coming to them. And that is the same reason you are here today—your Savior and King is here for you. He doesn't ride into your heart to remind you of your guilty past...although He could. What you and I have done in our past is downright sinful and wicked. The good news is that Jesus is here to forgive you. He comes to you with pardon and peace. He rode that donkey then to die for you, and He rides His donkey today to give you life; the life He won for you by His death and resurrection.

“Behold, your King is coming,” says the Prophet; but He does not come with force. He comes with mercy. He comes humbly, not to crown Himself as your King, but to give you the crown of life—the crown He won for you on His cross. He is your King because He does for you what you cannot do for yourself—He saves you from sin and hell. “Hosanna!” we cry with them. “Save us now!” it means. And He does. He gives you His salvation here and now so that your future with Him is safe and secure.

I overheard a group of teen-age boys last week discussing their bad behavior. And it was bad—dirty mouths, lustful eyes and hearts. And they were of the opinion that there was no hope for them; that their lot in eternity was already decided. They assumed that their place would be with the wicked. “Then answer me one thing, “I asked them, “Is what Jesus did for you worth nothing?”

There isn't one sinner here today who needs to leave this House in despair. Jesus is present here for you today with His grace and mercy. He wouldn't have come if you were beyond saving. But He has saved you. He has died for you. And He is here in Word and Sacrament to forgive you, and to give you the faith to believe this. Christ Jesus is in the

present tense. What He did for you means everything. What He will do is to bring you to His home above. And the reason why is because now...here in the present...He gives you, the Daughter of Zion, the gifts that only your King can give—forgiveness and life. He, your eternal King, gives you a place in His heaven. Amen.