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Advent 1, 2016

Matthew 21:1-9

Let us pray: "Dearest Jesus: Love caused Your incarnation. Love brought you down to me. Your thirst for my salvation procured my liberty. O Love beyond all telling, that led You to embrace, in love, all love excelling, our lost and fallen race."

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem teaches us as much about us as it does about Jesus. It is after all for us that Jesus comes. We must never view Jesus as some remote figure of the past about whom we can gain some historical knowledge without learning also about ourselves. There's many a king in the books of history who ruled over his people and affected them for some number of years by his earthly reign. And you can study these men, you can gather facts about a Julius Caesar or a Charlemagne while feeling the cold distance of centuries separating you from their influence. But this is not the case with Jesus. He came into the gates of Jerusalem not to reign for a time over an earthly kingdom, but to establish a spiritual Kingdom that has no end. We don't listen today to the words of this Gospel as if the prophet's declaration applied only to some Jews residing in Jerusalem in AD 30. The prophet cries out, "Behold, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey." And these words are directed to you. Jesus rode into Jerusalem as your King. He rode into Jerusalem to shed his blood for your sins, to conquer your death, and to crush the head of your accuser. He rode into Jerusalem to win you the Kingdom of His grace, and this Kingdom comes now, comes today, to those who listen with faith to the words of their King.

Today we begin the season of Advent. Advent means coming. And it is Christ's coming that we look forward to celebrating on Christmas. But we cannot celebrate Christmas as Christians unless we know why Jesus has come, who this baby is born in a manger, and why it matters for us. And so we begin the season of Advent with Jesus riding into Jerusalem to die as our King. That's why He was born.

The story of man-made religion has been one of trying to climb up to God. People think that with enough prayer, enough effort, enough pious exertion, they can learn who God is and have fellowship with Him. They think so little of their sin that they see it as no barrier between them and the holy God. And so they build their towers of Babel and trust in the power of human virtue to reach God. And in so doing, they attempt to dictate to God who He is and how He may be found.

But that is not the way it is with God. He is King. And the King sets the rules. Kings aren't elected by popular vote. The people don't get to dictate who their king should be or what policies he should follow. We elect leaders in America to suit our desires. We dictate to them what we want and they better do what we voted them in to do or they'll lose our vote and their power.

But Jesus is not the leader of a democracy. We don't dictate to Him by our vote or our will what kind of a King he will be. He is King and he comes without our bidding, by his own command, and to accomplish his own will.

So when the prophet cries out, "Behold," God is commanding our attention to this King. He points you to your King. Your King comes to you. Your King knows everything. He is God of God and Lord of Lord, very God of very God. He created the world and everything in it. And when He comes to you, He knows also who you are and what you've done, thought, and said. Nothing is hidden from Him. He sees into the recesses of your heart. He knows you have not loved God as you should. He knows your worries about the very things God promised to take care of. He knows that you've cared more about the opinions of other people than about God's opinion of you. He knows the lust and the greed and the jealousy. He knows it all.

And though God's own justice demands that we be punished for our sin, God cannot bear to see the sinner die. He doesn't come into Jerusalem with the Law and with terror to judge you for your sin. But he does come to those who have heard the Law and felt the terror of their sin. He comes to those who are broken and find no peace within themselves. To them He presents Himself as a humble Savior who will take their burdens on Himself and end the terror of God's judgment against them. He sees sinners helpless to free themselves from their sin, that they cannot win favor with their God, that they cannot rise to Him. And He is filled not with wrath but with pity.

So He comes to us in humility. Our King comes in humility because we cannot bear to receive Him in any other way. He takes on our flesh and becomes one of us, and then humbles himself to bear our burdens and carry our sins. He knows that He comes to a sinful world that will reject Him. He knows that people will prefer to stay in the captivity of their own sin and under the realm of the devil instead of welcoming Him as their King and receiving His forgiveness. He knows it all. But He walks into Jerusalem to die for all, to pay for every sin of every sinner.

This humility of our King is our greatest treasure. He hides his power so that we can't see it, but His power remains the power of God. A man dying on a cross doesn't look like power. It looks like weakness. A man riding a borrowed donkey doesn't look like riches, it looks like poverty. But it is precisely the riches of God's love that compels him to exert His power for us in Christ's humility, in his suffering and his death to take away our sin.

And God continues to exercise this power now. He came as a King into Jerusalem to earn us the Kingdom of peace with God. And now He comes to deliver that Kingdom to us. He comes to us who are broken and groan over our sins and yearn for deliverance. Every Divine Service we sing the cry of Hosanna before the Lord's Supper, because we know as surely as the crowd that met Jesus in Jerusalem that our King is coming to us. He comes under the humble elements of bread and wine. He doesn't

come in a display of power. He comes as if he is weak. But he isn't weak. He is our almighty God coming to us with the very body and blood that has won us release from our bondage to sin and the devil. He comes to us where we are, trapped in sin, and he lifts us up out of our sin, washes us clean by his blood, and sets us before God as pure and holy saints.

We just sang, "Lord, How shall I receive You, how welcome You aright?" We receive our Lord here today. We welcome Him aright as our Savior. We receive Him as He truly is, the Lord our Righteousness. And we give thanks to Him for his immeasurable goodness.