

Advent 1B, November 30, 2008
Church of the Reformation—Lutheran, Affton, MO
Text: Mark 11:1—10

A New Year's Parade

On this past Thursday at 8:30 a.m., the Macy's Christmas parade stepped off the corner of Washington Avenue and North Broadway in downtown St. Louis. Band, floats, balloons, clowns, and a Santa Claus or two were there to welcome in the season of good cheer, bargains, and hopeful financial success. On Friday morning at 4:00 a.m. for some and 5:00 a.m. for slouchers, Kohl's, JCPenny, Kmart, Walmart, Best Buy, and countless other stores opened their doors to the smaller parades of shoppers.

Parades seem to be the order of the day; and the Church, not to be left out, provides us with a New Year's Day parade. Yet even on this New Year's Day, the first day of the new church year, the parade the church provides seems to be out of step. Instead of being on the road to Bethlehem, here we are on the road outside of Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday, waiting for Jesus to parade by.

The contrasts between the parades of this week and that of Palm Sunday could not be greater. One parade asks, "What's in your wallet?"; the other asks: "What's in your heart?" One parade uses marketing surveys and advertising flyers and commercials to give us what we want. The other parade knows us at our heart and gives us what we need. The one parade proclaims, "Behold, the X-Box, Wii, or whatever." The other proclaims, "**Behold, the Lamb of God.**"

So why Palm Sunday on this first Sunday of Advent? Why does Advent have to crimp our style and celebration? Can't we just have Christmas and be done with it? True, it does seem that in the parade of seasons and Sundays of the Church, Advent is out of step with everything around it. It marches to the beat of a different drummer. Advent is a season under stress, caught in the collision of conflicting interpretations and practices. During Advent, we find ourselves under stress, probably more this year with all the uncertainties of the market and world politics as well as our local economy. In Advent, the Church—that is we believers—stands at cross-purposes with the culture around us.

The culture around us and of which we are a part is a culture that has not changed much from the days of Isaiah (64:7), who said: **“There is no one who calls upon Your name, who rouses himself to take hold of You.”** The headlines, markets, disasters, catastrophes, and terrorist attacks certainly underscore our condition. As we confess every Sunday and realize every day that **“we [have] sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are a like polluted garment”** (Isaiah 64:5-6). And shall we be saved? That is the point of the Collect of the Day: **“Stir up, we implore You, Your power, O Lord, and come down that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and be saved by Your mighty deliverance.”** That is request Isaiah (64:1,2) records: **“Oh that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at Your presence to make Your name known to Your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at Your presence!”** We need something more than what wrapping paper and a few Christmas ditties can cover.

On that first Palm Sunday God indeed did something that we did not look for. God's Son, Jesus entered into Jerusalem, humble and riding on a donkey. Not quite the deliverance we had in mind. Yet it is where God is, riding over a path paved with polluted garments of sin, riding through shouts of "Hosanna—Lord, save us," riding all the way to His throne of the cross. There on the cross, where the mountain did shake, Christ dies and God no longer remembers our iniquity, our sin—for it is all wiped out by the death of His Son. With His death, Christ answers the "Hosanna" of the crowd and He saves us. That is the reason Christ came to Jerusalem; that is the reason He came to Bethlehem, and that is the reason He still comes to Affton, MO.

Christ comes to us today through the foolishness of preaching, through words of forgiveness, through the water and the Word of Holy Baptism, through the bread and wine of His body and blood of the Supper. Not quite the deliverance we had in mind. Yet, in all of these God proclaims, "**Behold, your king is coming to you, humble.**" No wonder we echo the first Palm Sunday crowd when we sing the Sanctus: "**Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest**" Lord, save us.

Our Advent "Hosanna" puts us at cross-purposes with the world around us. Christ's answer to our "Hosanna" gives us peace—peace with God, peace with one another, peace through sins forgiven. That was the purpose of His cross. His cross gives purpose for our lives, the purpose of proclaiming the peace of Christ's forgiveness to all of those around us in the parade of life.

So we live at cross-purposes to the society around us. We can live through the commercialism, the materialism that infects our gift-giving, the pagan atrocities that hallmark so much of our cultural holidays, for we have God's promise that He will save us and that He does in Christ, He

has saved us. And if we have any doubts about His promise—and there are times that we do—there is a whole chorus of testimony to the living, present Christ all around us. That testimony far exceeds the jingle of cash registers, the blast of carols from radio and malls, the babble of holiday crowds. The song of praise to God-with-us, to Immanuel, cannot be stilled, because it depends not merely on us or on any other generation. We live with the echoes of believers through the ages still resounding in our ears. Even before men and women took up the mighty chorus of **“Hosanna. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,”** angels announced the good news over Bethlehem. The song of praise to God is so strong, that if one day our human voices should fall silent, **“fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains”** would take up the song and **“repeat the sounding joy.”** We have Christ’s promise on that

In fact, it has happened already. After Good Friday, not Black Friday, after Good Friday, when the disciples had nothing say and every other human voice was stilled, it was a stone—a rolled-away stone—that sang God’s praise and first testified to the resurrection of Christ.

“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

That is what behind Paul Gerhardt’s hymn that we will sing during communion: “O Lord, How Shall I Meet You?”

Love caused Your incarnation;
Love brought You down to me.
Your thirst for my salvation
Procured my liberty.
Oh, love beyond all telling,
That led You to embrace,
In love, all love excelling,
Our lost and fallen race.

LSB 334:4

Henry V. Gerike