

Sermon Advent 1A 2019  
December 1, 2019  
Matthew 21: 1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson which was previously read, the Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

I was listening to yet another podcast this week, and it was talking about a professor from our Saint Louis seminary who was recently called to glory, a man by the name of Dr. Norman Nagel. There were a couple of this professor's students on the podcast, and they were describing what it was like sitting at the feet of this esteemed man. Now I never had the fortune of having Dr. Nagel, but I had a couple of his protégés, so I feel like I know him in some sense. But as they described him, it was fun to hear of how Christological Dr. Nagel's teaching always was. His goal was always to make sure that the seminary students understood that it would be their job as pastors to ensure that as they preached they gave their flocks Jesus. Or rather, to ensure that as they went about the task of preaching they got out of the way that Jesus would give Himself to the people, as He truly is wont to do. In view of that, then, one of the hosts asked these guests who had studied under Dr. Nagel how their ministries were most influenced by Dr. Nagel's teaching and understanding of preaching. One of them said that he learned from this man to look at the lesson and see how Jesus seeks to do this work of giving Himself to the people, but then to understand how the people might interrupt that.

It's in light of that perspective that I sat down, then to look at this lesson this morning. How does Jesus want to give Himself to the people, and how would people interrupt that? As we ask this question, it is good also to note how fitting it is to look at this lesson that we have for this first week in Advent, because that's exactly what Advent is about: it's about looking to Jesus' coming at the first Christmas, and looking at how He desires to give of Himself to His people. So, what do we see?

Well, I think we can see it pretty clearly in the text. Look at what's happening here. This is the Triumphal Entry. I spoke on Wednesday night of the Ten Lepers being a familiar lesson because we hear it every Thanksgiving, but this is more so. After all, what day do you think of when you hear this lesson? Surely, you can't help of thinking of Palm Sunday. After all, that's what this is about, the Lord's entry into Jerusalem on His way to die there on Holy Week. But then there are a lot of years where I choose it for this Sunday too, so you hear it at least once a year.

But what do we see in this? How is Jesus seeking to give Himself to His people and what gets in the way of that? We certainly knowing the end of Holy Week, we know how Jesus seeks to give Himself. He's riding into this city to carry the sins of the world in His body, that they may be sacrificed on the altar, not in the temple, but on the Tree of Life, the cross. In other words, He's going into the city to give Himself to the people that they would be forgiven of their sins as He utterly gives His whole being into death for them, for the whole world, for us, even. That's how Jesus desires to give of Himself. Properly speaking we could even say, He desires to give of Himself as the Messiah, couldn't we?

So what gets in the way of that? Well, what do we see in this story? We see Jesus telling the disciples to get the donkeys which they do. And ultimately what happens? Jesus mounts the donkey, He rides into Jerusalem and the crowds see this and know. This is their King. They get it! This is the Messiah! They even say it. Look there: **"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the**

**name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”** They see it, He’s the Son of David! This Jesus is the One coming in the Name of the Lord! And so they call to Him, “Hosanna!, Lord, save us!!”

In fact, as I read about this passage this week, it’s a loaded passage. There’s so much to it. Of course, hopefully as I say that you recognize it from our liturgy. We say this every week, don’t we? Hosanna! Blessed is He who cometh in the Name of the Lord! In fact what I read said it had a liturgical use then too. Apparently this was used in the rituals associated with the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Tabernacles. Now if you’re not familiar with that feast, that was the time of year when the Jews—some of whom still celebrate it today—when they would build little booths or tabernacles and they would live in them for a week. This was to remember God’s dwelling with them in the wilderness. But this phrase, which is a quote directly from Psalm 118 became associated with it because there developed a portion of the ritual which was a liturgical enactment of a crowning of a king. To some extent this was connected to the kings of Israel, but to some extent there was the understanding that this was to finally be fulfilled in the One coming on the eschatological day, the day that would fulfill all of time and all of the promises of God. **Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!!**

What joy then! It doesn’t sound like there’s anything getting in the way of Jesus giving Himself to the people. After all, they want the Messiah, Jesus gives Himself as the Messiah, they’re calling Jesus the Son of David, that King of David’s line, that Messiah coming in the Name of the Lord! So, what’s the problem? What’s getting in the way?

What’s getting in the way is what they think the Messiah is there to do. They think He’s coming as this King that’s bringing an earthly Kingdom. They think that He’s going to bring the freedom from Rome. They think that He’s going to bring this freedom there in Jerusalem, that Holy Week in 33 A.D. They think that Kingdom is coming down from heaven right then and there and all their trouble is over. But that’s not it, is it? This Jesus is humble, non-violent, non-warlike, opposed to the zealots who wanted to overthrow Rome. This Jesus riding on the donkey, does so to show what kind of King He’s going to show Himself to be. This Jesus is the King I spoke about last week who this week will identify Himself with the trial, the suffering, the death of sinners, of people, of you and me. And so the reality of Jesus, the Son of David, coming in the Name of the Lord is going to be interrupted by the assumptions of what they think He’s there to do.

And there is the place for us to examine how we get in the way of Jesus giving Himself to us. And to do that, let’s remember how He does that. How does Jesus give of Himself? Well, certainly, we have to begin with Him coming into the world at Christmas, as we’ll be celebrating in a few weeks. We have to consider how He gives up the entirety of heaven for this birth in a cold, dark stall, being laid in a manger. We have to consider the generosity of His life, where He had no place to lay His head, and no wealth and comfort to speak of, doing so for us. We have to point most of all to the self-donation of His whole being at the cross for our sins. But all of that is in the past, how does He give Himself to you now? You can say by faith, and that’s true. But how does He come to you to give you that faith? He comes to under the lowliness of His Word, under the humility, not of a donkey, but of water, of bread and wine. He comes to you giving the wholeness of His work that you might have Him for your good, for your benefit. To cling to in hope, and trust, and joy, in the knowledge of His forgiveness, His love, His care for you.

And this joy His desire for you, His desire that it would be your strength in trials, your comfort in sorrow, your encouragement in pain and suffering. He wants to give Himself to you for that.

So, then how do you get in the way? Well, there's the obvious connection that you get in the way when you don't avail yourself of those gifts, when you despise His Word, when you despise the promise of your baptism, when you ignore the glory of the body and blood here for you. But how else? How else do you get in the way of Jesus giving Himself to you?

To some extent, only you can answer that. But I can tell you things I see in myself and others, things that are our equivalent to making Jesus this Messiah who will free Israel from Rome in 33 A.D. What are those? They are when you think that Jesus' giving Himself for you is all about what He gives to you now. I think I've spoken of the "Theology of Glory" over and against the "Theology of the Cross." That is to say, I think I've described how we often are inclined to look with expectation for great things now, rather than suffering, despite the promise in the cross and the call to crucify ourselves that God actually is found working most deeply in that suffering. What's that look like? It looks like when we expect that our faith will result in us just being more pious and holy in our actions, poof! And so when we see that we aren't we get discouraged. Or more often the case, when we see that others aren't as we'd like them to be, then we judge them for their lack of faith. Instead, we ought to be grateful for the forgiveness of sin. Thanks be to God Jesus died even for that sin!

Or there's the best life now view, which is another theology of glory—that God is going to give us our best life now. Perhaps this isn't seen in our lives in so crass a way as it is preached in churches that preach this, what we call, prosperity gospel, but there is the discouragement we have when the things for which we pray aren't answered. It's seen when our medical conditions don't improve and we blame God because we've been praying for them, but Jesus wants the promise of the resurrection of our body to be our comfort. It's seen when we endure suffering and blame Jesus for not taking it away when He wants to give Himself to us so that His grace truly would be sufficient for us. It's seen when we reach what we think is our wits end in any situation, and don't see how He would give Himself to us that He would be the object of our faith, and not our own strength.

And Christians, as Jesus desires to give Himself, so He does in His mercy. Yes we get in the way, and we get in the way, but there He is still giving, and still giving. Giving in all His generosity revealed as He gave Himself at the cross after the Triumphal Entry, and as He comes to us now, giving us mercy and forgiveness in His Word and Supper. And in view of that we join in saying—hopefully without getting in the way: **Hosanna in the highest, blessed is the One coming in the name of the Lord, the Son of David.** Amen.