

“The Coming”

Based on Is. 64:1-9

Preached on Nov. 29, 2020 – Advent 1

Come down, Lord! Come down! Tear open the heavens and come down and make the mountains shake. Kindle the fire, boil the water, make those heathen quake in their boots at the sound of Your Name! Do like You used to do back in the good old days when You used to shake things up in a big way! Show Yourself for who You are, God, and come down to save us!

Don't you feel like talking like that sometimes? Don't you feel like having an Isaiah 64 moment where you look to heaven and say, “Come down here and stir up some trouble Lord!”

It's Advent, in case you can't tell. And here in the Church its nothing like the premature Christmas madness out there in the world. Advent is edgy, sober, watchful, expectant, hopeful, longing. The mood is urgent. The King is coming. Will you be ready? How could you possibly be ready?

Isaiah is our teacher for our Advent preparations. “You act for those who wait for You Lord. You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember You in Your ways.” Don't miss this important distinction. How is one made ready? It's not the one busily preparing, making themselves ready by all the things they do, but the one waiting, still, expecting. The one remembering – remembering that the Lord is gracious and giving. The one with faith. You are coming Lord, to meet the one joyfully waiting to receive what You promise. Make us ready for Your coming.

The season of Advent is really a remembering of three advents. For Advent means “coming. It starts with a backward glance at Christ's first advent in humility, coming by way of the Virgin, the manger, and the cross. That's why we hear the Palm Sunday Gospel again on this first Sunday in Advent. This is the King you are waiting for. The One who rode into Jerusalem atop a borrowed colt, whose throne was a cross and whose crown was made of thorns. This is the King who wages war on behalf of His people, yes, even on behalf of His enemies! The world has never known such a king or any such leader. One who literally lays down His life to save the world.

As glorious and triumphant as the Palm Sunday advent was, it was an advent of humility and sacrifice. This King had come to His city to die, to be crucified at the hands of religious and political men. This King was an army of One, going into battle alone to become our Sin and enter our death in order to conquer them for us.

Whatever we have to say about Jesus' Last Day advent, and His coming again with glory to judge the living and the dead needs to be viewed through the lens of this first advent. Jesus came to do justice to God's law. To do the righteousness of God for us. To create the way of salvation that is through faith in Him - and not through works of our own which do not and cannot work the righteousness of God.

Isaiah admits it to us, yes to all the world. “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.” Even our most stellar good works, our greatest acts of charity and self-sacrifice, our most noble altruism, our greatest religious works, all of these - are like a filthy, soiled garment, says the prophet. Here is the true heart of confession and contrition. It's not simply about feeling sorry for yourself, feeling bad about what you've done, feeling guilty, or really feeling anything at all. It's about recognizing that everything you do is so tainted with Sin that even what

appears to the eyes as a “righteous deed” it is still like a horribly soiled garment when held under the light of God’s Law.

It's kind of like a black light. Have you ever seen one of them? I saw this show once where they took a black light into hotel rooms *after* they had been cleaned. Not a pretty picture. Stains everywhere. But the truth is you’d get this effect in your own house, or by holding a black light to your own clothes.

Isaiah is telling us that God’s Law is like a “black light” that He holds up to what we think is our righteousness. It reveals the hidden stain of Sin and shows our righteousness to be more contaminated than we ever could imagine. It shows our lives to be the crime scenes that they really are – covered with selfish desires and thoughts that blemish all we do. We are like a fading leaf in fall, blown away by our iniquities. We are in the same boat with all of humanity in that no one naturally calls upon the Name of the Lord, no one rises up to take hold of the Lord. It’s simply not in us, not since the Fall.

God hides His face from us. He refuses to look at our filth, He turns away from Sin and leaves us to “melt in the hot hand of our iniquities.” What an image that is! It’s terrifying! Yet it points directly to the cross of Jesus, to His forsakenness, to His taking the heat of the Law in our place, to His melting in the hand of our iniquities. God doesn’t want to turn away from us so Jesus comes to take our place.

And so we see that recognizing the depths of our sin, and confessing the inadequacy of our righteousness, is only the prelude to advent preparation. For advent is truly a plea, a cry for mercy, a renewed call of faith’s trust in the promise of God to act in grace. “Be not so terribly angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever.” Plead for the mercy of Christ over and against our Sin, Isaiah teaches. Yes we have iniquities and sin beyond measure. Yes, our righteousness is like filthy rags in dire need of laundering. “Don’t remember it, Lord.” “Forgive our iniquities and remember our sins no more, as you have promised.” We are your people. We are baptized. You have claimed us with your Name. You have marked us as your own possession. Now don’t forget us.”

God remembers us, but He chooses for Jesus’ sake to remember not our sins. That’s the deal, and it’s the only deal the Lord makes. Our Sin for Jesus’ righteousness. Jesus’ ride into Jerusalem was not a victory lap. It wasn’t the conquering King coming home in triumph after defeating His enemies on the battlefield. It was not a ceremonial parade. It was “to fulfill all righteousness.” And while the crowd of disciples were correct in shouting Hosanna to the Son of David, they really had no idea what this meant or why He had come. They would by week’s end, and it would take a bit longer for the importance to finally sink in.

That was Jesus’ first advent in humility, being humbled under the Law to redeem humanity under the Law.

But what sustains us today is Jesus’ second advent, the advent of His coming in hidden glory. This is the advent of His sacramental coming by the preached Word and Sacrament, an advent sometimes tragically overlooked. We sometimes think and act as though Jesus has come and gone, that somehow He’s not here, but will come again one day.

But this isn’t true. Yes, He has withdrawn His visible presence, but not in a way that makes Him absent. In fact, He is more fully and completely “with us” than He was with His first band of disciples. He is “with us” by His Word in all its sacramental forms – in Baptism, in the Supper, in the spoken Word of

forgiveness in His Name. He is with us as He has promised, "I will be with you always until the end of the ages." And so Jesus hasn't really gone anywhere in going to heaven. No, He's returned to His former glory at the right hand of the Father in order that He might be "all in all" and "fill all things in every way." That means the One we are waiting for is the One who is already here. The kingdom we are waiting for is the kingdom that has already come. The glory we are waiting for is the glory that is already here, now in a humble and hidden way, but still very much here. His Baptism, His Body and Blood, His Word – they alone prepare you for His Great Day.

And that day is the third Advent. The coming of our Lord in great glory to judge the living and the dead. The day of Resurrection and Life. The day when faith is vindicated. Jesus gave a little preview of that Day on Transfiguration mountain with Peter, James, and John when He shone like the sun.

There is a coming Day, when sin is no more, when Death is finally ended, when Life reigns, when the Lordship of Jesus is made visible to all. That's what Advent is really all about. Not shopping days until Christmas. Not preparing for the holidays. Not cooking and baking and eating. Though we do all these things, and there is nothing wrong with any of these things, let us not miss what is really going on. The Day is coming. The Light has dawned. Get ready. The One who came in humility and who comes by Word and Sacrament will come in glory. The Lord who calls you is faithful. He will sustain and keep you. May He grant you a joyous and watchful Advent. In Jesus' Name, Amen.