

Advent 1 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord
Pusey House, 2020 GDW
Micah 4:1-7, Ps. 25:1-9, Romans 13:8-14, St Matthew 21:1-13

And the multitudes that went before ... cried, ... Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

Today we come to the beginning of a new year in the life of the Church. It's been a difficult year, so we are perhaps especially ready for the invitation to a new beginning a new start. This new beginning shaped by the coming of Christ. In Advent we prepare to celebrate the coming of Christ in the flesh, born for us in Bethlehem. We look forward in hope and expectation to the day when he comes again. This is a promise, not a threat, a promise that what he began in us and in the world we be brought to perfection. This looking back and looking forward is shaped by the 3rd coming of Christ, his coming in the present, here and now, today. ***Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.***

Advent is an invitation to hope and to joy, and we know that we need both hope and joy. The way we find this hope and joy is perhaps not what we expect. The Gospel is not the one that we might expect. Instead of scenes in Nazareth or Bethlehem, scenes with Mary and Joseph and promises of a mysterious birth, we find ourselves on Palm Sunday, Jesus coming to the holy city of Jerusalem to cries of Hosanna, the Lord Jesus in a surprisingly violent act interrupting and challenging the trade taking place in the temple. We hear a Gospel that leads not on to birth, but on to betrayal and crucifixion. Why? Christmas is a festival of affirmation – of God coming to be with us, to give us what we need most. But are we ready for this season of affirmation? The goods which we celebrate at Christmas, the joy of fellowship, of family life, or generosity, and delight in festival meals are in one sense fragile. Christmas is not only a festival of joy, but also a time of struggle for many, not of easy relationships, but difficult ones. We have to be made ready to receive what God comes to give.

So Advent is a season of preparation. This season of preparation is perhaps the place where the Church year is most out of synch with the calendar year. We are invited not to pre-Christmas festivities, but to a season of serious preparation. We are invited to have our lives reordered and cleaned so that we can come to the festival ready to celebrate what is good and life-giving, what gives joy and peace.

Some people will find this message frustrating. Life is tough enough, why do we need a message about the cleaning up of our souls and preparation? The season of preparation is a way of celebrating Christ who comes to us now, to his people, to his Church to our souls. The season of preparation helps us to recognize Christ in his coming, and the way that we prepare a place in our lives to welcome that coming.

Where does Christ come? He comes to Jerusalem, and to the temple.

Jerusalem is never just a city in the Bible. It is a home, an ideal, and a promise for the future. It is a home because Jerusalem is the place which God has chosen for the site of the temple. The temple is the house of God, the sign and sacrament of his presence. The temple in Jerusalem becomes in the NT a prophetic image of the Church, the assembly of all God's people. The Temple made with stones is replaced by the temple of Christ's body, and the Temple where he dwells in His body: ***know ye not***, says St Paul, ***that your body is the temple***

*of the Holy Spirit which is in you.*¹

We hear this lesson today because we celebrate the Lord's coming to us now. He comes to his holy city, to the Church, and he comes to our souls, to the temples of the holy Spirit.

Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

We take these words from the crowds who welcoming the Messiah to Jerusalem whenever we celebrate the Holy Communion. He is coming, and coming in a way that is not second best, but he comes to give himself more fully and completely to us than he did to the people in Jerusalem. He comes to dwell in us, to give us a share in his life. And yet, the signs seem so feeble or small to convey such a great gift. The Lord who came meek and lowly 'sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass' comes meek and lowly in the sacrament of his body in blood, in frail creatures of bread and wine. The means of grace often appear weak alongside the promises they convey. Can baptism in water make us temples of the Spirit? Can simple acts of prayer and worship be so significant? Is a life of virtue really a better way to peace than one of power? Are my little attempts to love so important, are my feeble attempts to learn more of God's will so valuable? Seeking to find Christ in the humble gifts of bread and wine teaches us to find him also in a life of is modelled on his.

This take us to the more challenging aspect of the Gospel, and one which also shapes the season of Advent.

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple; and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves

The problem our Lord finds in the Temple is not that the people were engaged in trade and commerce, but that a corrupt form of trade and commerce had taken over the life of the Temple

It is written, by House shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves. The work of the house and temple of God, the work of the soul, is prayer. Or, to put it another way, ***owe no man any thing, but to love one another.***

Prayer, 'in its most fundamental sense ... means willing God's will, which is love. Anything short of this is a sort of [robbery]'²

All our specific or discreet acts of prayer, are a kind of reaching out to God. All our attempts to love one another are a kind of prayer

This love is not just a warm fuzzy feeling, it has a content and a reality. The content of this loving is Christ, the one who perfectly loves the Father and who so perfectly loves the world. The love which we are called to live is a participation in this communion of eternal love by which the Son loves the Father in the bond of Love which is the Holy Spirit³

What is disturbing in this passage, and so many other of the parables and the miracles, that

¹ 'Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days.' 'With his resurrection the new Temple will begin: the living body of Jesus Christ, which will now stand in the sight of God and be the place of all worship. Into this body he incorporates men.' Benedict XVI, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 43

²*Advent Meditations*, Rev'd Dr. Robert D. Crouse, Originally presented for the Prayer Book Society of Canada, Nova Scotia/Prince Edward Island Branch Advent 2002 Institute, held at St. George's Round Church, November 30, 2002. <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/advent1/Crouse1to4.html>

³ 'The love that fulfils the law is not a matter of sentiment, or emotion, or affection; it is a matter of will. To love one another is to will the eternal good of another, as that eternal good is objectively manifest and understood in the clear light of the Advent of the eternal Word of God, Jesus Christ.'

Robert Crouse, Sermon 2 for Advent 1, Lectionary Central.

it is often the people closest to the temple who seem to get it wrong. It is often the religious experts, or the people who have a prominent place in religious life, that our Lord corrects and rebukes. This is part of the message to us, those of us who come to Church, receive the sacraments, need to hear this message every year. Every year we come back to message inviting us to welcome the Lord who comes, not just with cries of Hosanna, but also to welcome him to come into our souls to reveal what is false, what pretends to be part of the life of the Temple, but is really corrupt.

How do we recognize this? The cries of Hosanna in the Gospel lead on to cries of ‘crucify him, crucify him. How does it happen? There are lots of people involved, and malign power in the work of the devil and his helpers, but the figure of Judas is key. He is the one who betrays Christ. Looking for the character of Judas in our hearts can help us to recognize false commerce in our souls. Judas was disappointed that Christ did not give him what he expected or do what he wanted. His speech about giving his body as a kind of food seemed like madness.

We often know it when we refuse to accept the commerce of love, when the Judas part of our souls threatens to take over. We can be disappointed with our Lord Jesus when we don’t do what he asks of us, or we may be disappointed that is difficult to know what he wants of us.

This attention to love might appear inward or small. When Christ came, the people expected freedom from Romans. This longing for restoration and freedom on a grand scale has always been part of the Christian hope and message.

This year, movements like extinction rebellion, blm, have something of this longing for a more perfect freedom and justice.

We may look for hope in political reformation, lessons of Advent invite us to look for transformation from the inside out, beginning with us.

We come to this beginning of Christian year at a particular time of uncertainty. We look for better days, and we seek wisdom to know how to find our way there.

Season of advent invites us to connect our hopes and longings with God’s good purposes for us. Christ has come, and he will come again—how we celebrate these comings will be shaped by how we recognize his coming now.

Let us pray: Visit and cleanse, we beseech thee, O Lord, the hearts of thy people, that when thy Son of our Lord Jesus Christ comes, today, and at His second coming to judge the quick and the dead, He may find in us a mansion and a temple prepared for Himself, through the same thy Son JC our Lord, who with thee and the H.S. liveth and reigneth one God, world w/t end. Amen.