

When Jesus is near, all that we need and hope for is already at hand. He does not just deliver salvation, He is salvation. He does not just give life, He is life. In this Man is the living God come to suffer and die, to rise again and rule over all things for His people. All of Israel's history, all the ancient hopes and promises, what patriarchs and priests, prophets and kings all longed for, come to their fulfillment in His atoning death. It is that event that seals the undoing of sin and death, that ensures final deliverance of all of God's people and the restoration of all creation. That is why at Jesus' death, the signs of the end appear already. The sky darkens, the ground shakes, the tombs are opened and the dead rise. It is as though creation is confused, thinks this is it, and in a sense that is correct. What needed to be done has been done.

But God, in His wisdom, delays the full appearing. He desires that yet more would hear and believe. So with all creation we also must wait for the final and full redemption, what is promised to come one day, what we will hear of next Sunday. But today we ponder the comforting truth that already our Lord comes. Already the kingdom of God comes among us. Already He gives us His Word and Spirit that we may believe His holy Word, receive the salvation won for us by our Lord's work. Already we are given the benefits of our Lord's death and resurrection. Already His forgiveness, life, and salvation, are given and applied to us, declared by the Father to be our very own.

There, on that donkey, riding into Jerusalem, is the long-awaited king, the Lord Himself, the righteousness and salvation of His people. That is not discerned by the eyes of anyone in that crowd. It is a pretty solid argument that they do not grasp the full depth of what they say in their hymn of praise, they sing Psalm 118 simply in the joy of the moment as they draw near to Jerusalem for the great festival.

But we do. That is why we take up their hymn as our own, quite deliberately, and we also sing it not about but to the Lord who is present among us according to His Word and Promise, and shortly in His true body and blood. The Lord is not absent, only to come again, but comes even now, is present, and with Him, all His gifts, though they are not seen, only believed by faith. This does not make them any less real.

The great emphasis in the first part of the Book of Revelation is not what is yet to come. It is not a guide for how to follow the news to try and discern the time of the Lord's coming. Rather it is written first to show the church the present reality in the world, and especially in the church as she gathers. The Lord Jesus stands in midst of His Church now. The throne room of heaven stands open now. Jesus reigns already now. He invites all now to hear and believe.

This is why the liturgy of the Divine Service is like nothing else on this earth or in our lives. We begin with the simple conviction that Jesus and all that we need and hope for is here, hidden, but nonetheless real. This is not pretend, this is not cosplay, or mere human entertainment. Everything that is done and said is to underscore the reality of who is present here, and what He is doing and giving. Just as Jesus directed His disciples prepare, just as the crowd undertook concrete actions to show and confess that here was the long-promised King entering Jerusalem, so our service is structured and conducted deliberately to show and confess that here is that same King and Messiah, entering into our midst.

This is what so many of the hymns of Advent have us sing. *Savior of the Nations, come, Virgin's Son, make here Thy home*, that is not asking the Lord Jesus to come and be born here again, but for Him to come to us in His grace, in His Word and Body and Blood. We will sing, *Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates*, using the words

of Psalm 24 to implore the Lord to come to us and for us to be ready and prepared. *Fling wide the portals of your heart; Make it a temple set apart...So shall you Sovereign enter in....Redeemer, come and open wide My heart to Thee; here Lord, abide!*

And in Come, Thou Precious Ransom, Come; *Enter now my waiting heart, Glorious King and Lord most holy. Dwell in me and ne'er depart...Ah, what riches will be mine When Thou art my guest divine!*

It is already, now, begun in this time and life that our Lord Jesus comes to us. We are not left on our own, with a distant Lord who can only cheer us on from afar. He comes even now to strengthen and refresh us, to assure us that the hardest part is over and past, for He has done that for us.

As we do every Sunday, we will soon pray, “Thy kingdom come,” “Come, Lord Jesus!” longing for His final and glorious coming again. And even as it seems we must wait yet longer, He does not stay away, but comes even now, answering that prayer as He comes to us in His body and blood, showing to believing hearts that He has done it, has purchased and won us, and strengthens our hope that He is coming back.

Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!