

Pastor T.C. Arnold
1st Sunday of Advent
Matthew 21:1-9
December 1st, 2013

A narrative has a beginning, a middle and an end. Once there is an end, or conclusion to the narrative, we call it a story. If the story has no conclusion, we call it a broken narrative. There is a beginning, a middle but no end. Tragedies and disasters cause narratives to be lived and relived time and time again. I once knew a man who spoke of his time serving our country during World War II in the present tense – as if he were living those days still in his bunker fighting the Germans, even though the year was 2005 at the time. His narrative was broken. Many of us live with broken narratives. Resolution – the end of the story – never seems to come.

The Gospel text for today sounds out of place. The Triumphal Entry of Jesus seems to fit better in the narrative of Jesus closer to Good Friday and Easter Sunday. As far as the timeline of the life of Jesus would be concerned, that indeed is the case. This is a story near the end of the narrative. However, this is the first – the beginning – of the Church-Year. Today is Advent 1, New Year's Day, if you will. Why is this story at the beginning of the Church-Year narrative instead of closer to the end like that of the life of Christ? The Church-Year does follow the life of Christ from Christmas to Good Friday to Easter Sunday and then to His blessed Ascension. Is the Church-Year narrative broken?

No. In the narrative of Christ, much like the Church-Year narrative, the beginning points to the end and end has us start back at the beginning. The beginning and the end of the story of Jesus put us right where need to be. Allow me to put it another way by asking a different question: Is the Lord's coming to His people past, present or future tense? Is it beginning, middle or end? The answer is yes.

As Christians we say, Jesus came, He comes and we say that He will come again – past, present and future – beginning middle and end. The narrative of humanity is not broken, it is simply incomplete. Our narratives might be broken – broken lives, broken dreams – but not our Lord's. We just haven't had the opportunity to see the end of it yet. We might think that God is broken – or that He is not fulfilling promises – or He "can't" get the job of saving you, that is, bringing you peace and comfort accomplished. No. Rather, the time for the end of the narrative has not come for us yet. So we plow on in this vale of tears until that day.

Advent, maybe more than any other season in the Church-Year, has us step back and look at the big picture of God's story. Advent is a past, present and future kind of season. Advent is a beginning, middle and end type of season. For that reason, we are not just looking forward to a baby in a manger come twenty-five days from now. We are looking back at that manger story that took place 2000 years ago. We are also looking at our lives right now and seeing how our Lord comes today for you. We are looking, and maybe in most intently, toward our Lord's coming again – future tense – fulfilled promises in what is yet to happen. Advent is a "big picture" type of season and Jesus is the star.

Because we know what Jesus has done for us, does for us today and will do for us yet on the last day, we can be confident to know that this narrative for our life has already been written. That by baptism and the forgiveness of sins our Lord has already claimed us as His own – one who will inherit eternal life. The story is complete – but not yet complete. In other words, all has been done for us, but we just haven't seen the absolute result of all that has been done for us.

Sure, we have the cross and the grave. Sure we have the hope and promise of His coming again. All those things are seen through the Word with our eyes in faith.

And though we see it, believe it, and know it – I know, at times we wonder how all that we see is for us... for you! There's a reality TV show for everything nowadays. There are a couple of shows where people use metal detectors in and around old civil war battle grounds, colonies, settlements and other time forgotten places looking to "unearth" treasures buried in the ground. As soon as these items – whether they be buttons, coins or just simply fragments of metal come to surface – a story appears with it. They tell you where it's from, what it was a part of, how old it is. It's an "unearthed," revealed, and set before your eyes history lesson.

Unfortunately, instead of digging for the treasure of life and forgiveness in the Scriptures, we often "unearth" the guilt of our own past sins. We call them to mind. We even repeat them from time to time for some reason. We unearth and live again, sometimes to our great dismay – digging up the pain that comes along with it – all that burdens our hearts. In the narrative of our lives, we have a beginning, a middle – and then the bad middle parts – the brokenness of sin – is relived again and again. Even though our Lord points to you and says, "Your sins are forgiven," this never keeps us from replaying and reliving the terrible things we have done – have seen done to us – in this world. And this kind of "unearthing" is a history lesson that we do not need, that causes us the worst kind of pain, that causes us to believe, "there is no way, I could be worthy."

And you are right, you are not worthy. For that reason we need not unearth our guilt that shows us where we stand before God in our sins. But, rather, we "unearth" – bring to light – the life-giving narrative. See and hear in the Word of God the truth of life. Advent begins again the story that will take us right to the very heart, the very person, who is at the center of the narrative. He is the beginning and the end – the Alpha and the Omega. He is present with you today as we kick-off another Church-Year that will take us to Bethlehem, to Galilee in Jesus' ministry, to Jerusalem, to the cross, to the empty tomb, to the mount of the Ascension, and to the promise of His coming again. A blessed, joy-filled promise that is for us as Christians.

"Here comes Santa Claus, Here comes Santa Claus, right down Santa Claus Lane. Vixen and Blitzen and all his reindeer pullin' on the reins." Is this the narrative for the month of December now at hand? We have already heard this story – told and retold. This is the story of Christmas for the world. There is a better story, and it begins at Advent. It has a beginning and middle and an end. Santa with his sleigh filled with presents is not the main character. Rather, Jesus is. As we keep Advent in view while we approach the blessed season of Christmas, we keep before us the main character – yes, the one who has already come – already lived and died and lives again. Yes, the one who tells the whole story as we know this story by God's grace through faith. Yes, as it is told and more than just a story told – but lived for you and given for you. May God richly bless you and keep you as we begin again this precious narrative that includes us as partakers of what was/is given. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.