

Pastor T.C. Arnold
1st Sunday in Advent
Psalm 24
December 2nd, 2018

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart... he will receive blessing from the Lord... such is the generation of those who seek him.

Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle...

It's Advent already again. The beginning of a new church-year. This is our "Happy New Year" day for the church. And Advent, this new-year season, will call us to mind of the coming of our Lord. Yes, the celebration of the coming of a child in Bethlehem. But, more specifically, about the coming of our Lord to you today, and even more so, the coming of our Lord for you on the last day.

Today, we have the triumphal entry of Jesus... Palm Sunday, so to speak... at the beginning of the church-year. Jesus comes to Jerusalem, he comes to the temple. Jesus, the Lord of all, comes to be with His people and to give Himself into death for them.

And also, we have the Psalm appointed for today... the words that I just read (and that we spoke responsively at the beginning of Matins). This is an entry song. Most likely, David wrote this Psalm, guided by the Holy Spirit, for the entry of the Ark of the Covenant into the Tabernacle in Jerusalem... God coming into the Holy City and into His place of Worship. But remember, the way that the Ark got into the tabernacle was not without its problems. Even when God's people are doing Godly things, things don't go as smoothly as one would hope. And that's life as we know it. Nothing seems to go according to plan.

Remember that the Ark of the Covenant was being brought in to Jerusalem from Abinadab's house which sat on a hill. His two sons, Uzzah and Ahio would drive the cart and the oxen, which had the Ark on it, forward. Then, the oxen pulling the cart stumbled and the Ark was about to fall. Uzzah puts his hand up to stabilize it... what any of us would have done... to save the Ark from tumbling. Yet, Uzzah was stricken dead by the Lord because he touched what God said not to touch. It's a tragic story... and we don't think it to be fair. But, God was holding true to His Word... you touch the Ark, you die. It's true, not even the Lord entering into His place of rest goes smoothly. Nothing goes according to plan... at least our plans.

And so, when it did finally happen, that the Ark of the Covenant would go to where God would have it to be, the people of God would sing these words, from Psalm 24, calling upon the people to approach the Lord with "*clean hands and a pure heart*,"... to repent of their sins and stand before the Lord guiltless. And, as they stand guiltless before the Lord, they will, "*receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation.*" But this never would be able to happen without God Himself entering into their presence and **making** them guiltless before the presence of the Lord. God's entrance must happen for them... and for us. God's entrance, for a people who never see things go according to plan... for those who never see things run smoothly... who come to a place like today with unclean hands and unclean hearts. God must enter in.

God's people are unclean... then and now. Tainted with sin, it runs deep within every fiber of our being. Nothing about us is pure and clean and right with the Lord. We are an unholy people. We

wonder why things don't ever go according to our plan... or at least that it never seems to do so. We live in a world where the cart and the oxen stumble and we didn't even have anything to do with it. And yet, with every good intention, we try to hold up the Ark, only to get stricken down for doing so. It's so unfair... for us... we think. But this is where we live. We live in a world of sin inhabited by sinners of which you are one of them. Nothing will ever be perfect here. Nothing will ever go "according to plan" all the time. Sometimes we are the ones who mess up the plans. Sometimes it's others who do it. Yet we have a Lord who is in charge of all things and these terrible things still happen. We call this God's hidden work. Make no mistake about it, you have a God who is still in charge of your days and your nights.

So, when our best laid plans come to naught, when our desire is not what God wants but what we want in place of what God wants for us, repent. Repent dear brothers and sisters in Christ and sing to the Lord. Call out to God and rejoice because the Lord comes to His people and He promises to come and save us and to rescue us when troubles emerge. When death comes unexpectedly, when illness ravages, when disappointment reigns, *lift up your heads, be lifted up. Lift up the gate and open the door, for the King of glory.* He comes to rescue His people. He comes to forgive the sins of those with unclean hearts and tainted lives. In other words, God comes for all of His people... *strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle*, like it says in the text.

Beloved, this is Advent... Our Lord comes into His holy city... He is ushered into where He belongs even when the best laid plans to do so don't work out the way we had hoped. The Lord comes into the lives of God's people, all mangled and messed up through sin and anguish and suffering and despair. The Lord comes and God's people shout on this day... *Lift up your heads, O gates... be lifted up O ancient doors... here comes the King of glory.* Here He comes, marching down the mountain with shouts of hosanna from all who welcome Him. Here He comes to you, oh blessed in the Lord. Here He comes to rescue you and to forgive you. He comes to bring peace to the brokenhearted.

Imagine, if you would, being a part of a holy procession. God's people, so filled with thanksgiving in their heart, that they desire to be in His presence. The people of God sing to the Lord as they approach the gates. They sing as they get closer and closer. Their songs intensify and the crowd gets louder and louder. They are shouting because all they can do is sing louder as they approach God. He's greater than the superstar sports hero after he makes a tremendous play to save the game. He's greater than our favorite movie star or rock band that we get to see live and in person. When God's people approached the gates of the Lord... they shout to have those gates lifted up to the Lord. Let the people and the Lord be in communion with one another. Let them not be apart any longer. The Lord comes to His people and the people need Him.

This year, our Advent Midweek Series is called "What Child Is This?" Before us will be set the unmatched blessing of the Lord's incarnation. The hymn, "What Child Is This," helps us in this regard by making connections that we might not otherwise make. So I encourage you to come and be a part of our Midweek Advent Service. They remind us that God comes to His people. He comes to be like us in every way except one... that He loves us so much that He would do this. And we, as God's people, just cannot contain our elation. We sing and we shout because God comes to save His people! Thanks be to God. Amen.

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