

Sermon for Advent 1 - Matthew 21:1-9

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden." The Lord came into this world lowly and humble, just as we truly are. Even if we don't admit it, we are powerless. Our spirits are willing, but our flesh is weak. It's terribly difficult to subdue the flesh, and the things we would not do, the things we hate, those are the things we do. The flesh betrays us again and again. It's the seedbed of lust and gluttony. All of our deepest sorrows come from our own sins.

The years pass by and memory can clutch onto our list of sins, the catalogs of lies we've told, the promises we've forgotten, the slander that has risen up from our hearts. Is it any wonder why our families are so broken? Is it any wonder why our lives are so complicated? So too do we see in retrospect the signs of God's wrath as well as the temporary character of this earth. Terrorists, earthquakes, divorce, and war all serve as warnings of the judgment to come. Nothing on earth is the same today as it was before. If we take one step forward, we still suffer two steps back. All things are in decay. All things are dying. We are in constant turmoil and change. Death is having its way. Only the Word of God never changes.

This should fill us with fear. This should change our behavior, but instead we hatch new plans in a facade to cover our sins and cheat death. We build bigger barns to store our crops. We delay paying our debts. We kill our enemies, or at least destroy their reputations.

These plans are vain. Our pretending at wisdom is a mockery of the Wisdom which comes down from above.

The weakness of our flesh does not live in our bodies, but in our minds. If you've ever had the common holiday experience of eating so much that it was hard to breathe or you had to loosen your belt, you have proven that your mind rules your body, and rarely for good. Our fallen minds have sought pleasure after pleasure and ignored the clear warnings of excessiveness and kept wanting more even though it hurt. It's not the skin and bones that are the problem. It's our personalities and our wills which crave pleasure and vice. It's we ourselves, in our innermost beings, who are broken and sick, rotten and dying.

Yet for this reason, our Lord has come. He has taken up the weakness of our flesh. He becomes one of us: body, mind, and spirit, in order to redeem our fallen flesh, in order to redeem our perverted wills, in order to redeem our sickened minds. He did not leave us here alone to suffer in our craven weaknesses. He has come to rescue us.

He is one of us in every way, but He's not weak. He doesn't sin. He can't sin, because the Law is His will. He is the Law and while He is humble and lowly, He is not weak. And what's more, He doesn't come in the declared-to-be-good flesh of Adam. That's right, Jesus didn't become man before the Fall into sin. He doesn't take the easy road and insert Himself into the Garden of Eden. Rather, He comes in the corrupted flesh of St. Mary and all mankind. He takes up our human flesh which is prone to alcoholism, homosexuality, cancer, weariness, and most significantly, death. He comes in the cursed flesh of Adam's inheritance. He enters into the chaos of our dying lives. He comes to endure our hatred and our betrayal, our violence and our phoniness. He is tempted in every way that we are, but He does not succumb to sin. His Flesh is as willing as His Spirit. He endures all that we do to Him without a desire for vengeance. He cares nothing for His reputation or His success. He endures in perfect love. He is at one with His Father's will. Their will is to give Jesus Christ into death at the hands of sinners so that those sinners might be redeemed and live eternally. God died as man so that man might live forever with God. Christ comes to steal Satan's prey by serving as the Victim and Priest of His own unbending Law, that is, of His own unbending and perfect will. He who knew no sin, knew what He is doing, and became sin to make sinners free from sin and death.

That's why He rides a donkey into Jerusalem. He comes to be a sacrifice. That crowd of sinners which adored Him was inspired by the Holy Spirit, because only sinners shout, "Hosanna/ Save us now!" Only sinners need to be saved. They carpet His path to the cross with garments and palms. Soon He will not be carried, but He will carry the instrument of His own death. He will not walk upon coats and palms but will fall, naked on the path to Golgotha. But we are not ashamed and we do not feel sorry for Him. For we are the sinners who need Him to do it. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit we shout, 'Hosanna, save us now! Ride on, O Lord. You are the Blessed One who comes in the Name of the Lord, in the Lord's will, with the Lord's Life in Your Blood. You are our Salvation. You are our Savior. Hosanna!"

We are the sinners who shout for the Messiah to be Himself: to save us and to keep His promises. Unlike us, He is not weak. He does what He says. And thus shouting sinners are transformed by the Word. By grace He makes us praying saints, saints whom the Lord loves, saints with whom He is well-pleased, saints whose weakness has been washed away, saints who are forgiven. The Lord's Final Coming is not a day of wrath to be feared. It's a day of homecoming, a day of celebration. The Lord who came to earth as a Man first in Bethlehem, comes now as a Man, our God, in His Word and Sacraments, and soon He shall come again in glory. Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠