

Advent 1
Matthew 21:1-9

I was shocked by two deaths this week. They were both unexpected. One guy was known by pretty much everyone in the world. The other guy was known inside certain circles. One guy will be laid in state in Argentina so many can adore him. The other will have a Lutheran funeral and be remembered by family and friends. However, they both had an impact on the world.

One guy is Diego Maradona, the famous football, or soccer, star. He was only 60 years old. He was voted as one of two best footballers in the twentieth century along with Pele. The soccer world adored him for his amazing play but no one adored Diego Maradona more than himself. Even with all his arrogance he was beloved by many.

The other guy is Paul McCain who was a publisher at Concordia Publishing House. He was only 58 years old. He was responsible for the reader's edition of the Book of Concord. He was responsible for getting the Book of Concord, our confessions, into the homes of laymen and laywomen which is where it belongs. And not just in America, but literally all over the world. Those who knew Paul loved him for his love of Scriptures and the Book of Concord.

Both men had an impact across the globe; one for personal stardom and the other for the spread of the Gospel. I don't know Maradona's faith or if he even had one. He lived as if he did not. I know Paul McCain's faith because I heard him confess it many times. And Paul would be the first to say that he needed what Ignatius of Antioch referred to as the "medicine of immortality." Both men needed it. As do you. Ignatius was a disciple of St.

John the Apostle, but is probably remembered most for his phrase, “medicine of immortality.”

The medicine of immortality is the Lord’s Supper. Our catechism asks “What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?” Answer: “These words, ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,’ show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.” Our Lord comes to us and gives us forgiveness, life, and salvation through faith in this bodily eating and drinking. This is why St. Ignatius calls it the medicine of immortality.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. We celebrate our Lord coming to us. During Holy Week, He came into Jerusalem “humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.” God promised that this would happen in both Isaiah (62:11) and Zechariah (9:9). You know if God repeats something, it’s important. Both passages speak of God’s salvation coming with Jesus. The Isaiah passage says that “His recompense [comes] before Him.” The recompense of God must be fulfilled if our sins are to be forgiven. God pours out His recompense upon Jesus upon the cross. All that is left is humility and salvation. Jesus comes to us humbly riding in, with, and under the bread and wine bringing His salvation to be received in faith.

There is a warning about this humble body and bread in simple bread and wine. As you know, Paul says, “Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord... That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” (1 Corinthians 11:27, 30) “Who receives this sacrament worthily?” Answer: “Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of

sins.” The Corinthians were guilty of treating the Lord’s Supper like a mere potluck and discriminating against poor people. They didn’t treat the Lord’s Supper like an actual visitation of the Lord which is precisely what it is. Jesus is here with us physically and bodily during the Lord’s Supper even though we don’t see Him.

Right before we receive the Lord’s Supper we sing the Sanctus and sing basically the same words that the crowd shouts.

“Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth;
Heav’n and earth are full of Thy glory.
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is He, blessed is He,
blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.

Hosanna means “save us now.” God saves us now by “He that cometh in the name of the Lord:” Jesus Christ. When Jesus entered Jerusalem the work of salvation was still to be accomplished on the cross. Jesus endured suffering and death on a cross to crush the serpent’s head. (Genesis 3:15) He died but He rose to ride again. And ride again He does in, with, and under simple bread and wine. And when He rides into Rialto, California, the work of salvation is already accomplished. He delivers to you what He won on the cross, namely, eternal salvation. The Lord’s Supper is truly the medicine of immortality. Those who receive it in faith for the forgiveness of sins have exactly that. And with forgiveness of sins comes eternal salvation!

During Advent we celebrate the three fold coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. His first coming was His incarnation. He took on human flesh and defeated sin, death, and the devil in our place. The second coming is in Word and bread and wine. When Jesus says, “where two or three are gathered in My

name, there am I among them," (Matthew 18:20) He is not really talking about small groups or conventicles, but about the gathering of the church. It is true that whenever we hear or meditate upon His Word, the Holy Spirit brings Christ to us. But the real, bodily presence of Christ is found only in the Divine Service. The third coming of Christ is in glory. He will bring His recompense before Him just as Isaiah prophesies. Not for you and I who have received grace upon grace, but upon those who aren't covered by the blood of the Lamb.

You have nothing to fear that day. You know that your Lord is humble. You know that Jesus is for you and not against you. You know that glories which the eye has not seen and ear not heard awaits you in Christ's second coming. We eagerly await that day. But that brings up a great question: if we take the medicine of immortality, why must we pass through death?

Some will not face death. Christians who are alive when Christ comes again in glory will be changed in the blink of an eye. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52) The rest of us must face death. This is how Paul talks about your death: "it is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15:42-44) This is why you don't look at yourself for assurance of salvation. If you look at yourself in the flesh, all you can see now is a perishable, dishonorable, weak body. If you look to the promises of Christ, you're able to see an imperishable, glorious, powerful body. Your natural body that you inherited from Adam dies and you receive your spiritual body inherited from Christ. When Paul says "spiritual" body here, he is talking about a complete body, spirit and body. God created us as spirit and body and He restores us as spirit and body.

I was shocked by two deaths this week. I was shocked because they were unexpected. When death happens in what we call "natural" causes, we can

be lulled into thinking that this is the natural way of things. It's what Disney and Satan call the circle of life. But death is not natural. It is the wages of sin. (Romans 6:23) Christ paid the full wage of sin on the cross. But we must pass through death so that we don't live with the old Adam forever. What a horrible fate that would be! Unexpected deaths remind us that we are sinners and that we will die too. But they also remind us of the visitation of our Lord in history, in bread and wine, and in the future. He visits us and gives us the medicine of immortality so that we pass through death into eternal life. When He comes in the future it is not to chastise or punish us, but to rescue us and reward us with eternal life.

Pray for the families of Diego Maradona and Paul McCain. They are suffering the deaths of their loved ones. They are still stuck in the veil of tears. They need comfort. But the comfort they need is the same comfort we need: the visitation of our Lord:

Hosanna, hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is He, blessed is He, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.

And blessed are you who are not ashamed to call Him Lord!

In Jesus' name. Amen.