

The First Sunday in Advent  
Matthew 21:1-9

Last Sunday, I gave you an assignment. You were to read a chapter of Scripture and spend five to ten minutes meditating upon it. I hope you tried. And if you did try, I bet many of you failed to meditate on the reading for the full five minutes. That's okay. Keep trying. It's worth it to keep trying because it is the only real permanent thing. Men will fall and be forgotten. Kingdoms will fall and be forgotten. God's kingdom will never fall and never be forgotten!

If you read the daily lectionary like I did, you at least had some imaginative material to meditate upon. Last Monday in the Old Testament reading we read about Nebuchadnezzar's first dream and Daniel's interpretation of that dream. Babylon fell just like every other kingdom. Most people don't remember it. I had to use the spell checker to get Nebuchadnezzar's name right. And I bet you would to. Yet God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar what He was going to do with a dream. It was quite a fantastic dream.

He sees an impossibly high, bright, frightening giant made of four metals. The head was made of gold. The chest and arms were made of silver. The stomach and thighs were made of bronze. And the shins and feet were made of iron. The feet, down by the toes, had clay mixed with the iron. He sees an invisible hand pluck out a big stone from a mountain. The stone is thrown at the statue and hits it in the feet and shatters them. The rest of the statue falls on the rock and is broken into pieces. Nebuchadnezzar is shrewd and wants his wise men and magicians to interpret the dream after they tell them what it was. This way he would know the interpretation was true. They admit that's it impossible for them to tell him the dream he had. Daniel admits the same thing but says there is a true God of heaven and earth who is the Giver and Interpreter of dreams. He will reveal to Daniel the dream and its interpretation.

Daniel reveals the dream and then gives its interpretation. He reveals that the gold head is Nebuchadnezzar. Three kingdoms will come after him represented by the silver, bronze, and iron. The last kingdom will be a mixed kingdom, so hence the clay mixed with iron. In the time of the iron kingdom, God will set up an everlasting kingdom.

We know from history that the silver kingdom was the Persians, the bronze kingdom was the Greeks led by Alexander the Great, and the iron kingdom is the Romans. The Persians destroyed the Babylonian kingdom. The Greeks destroyed the Persian kingdom. And the Romans destroyed the Greek kingdom. The Romans, who got too big and mixed way too many people together, self-destructed and is no more unless you count what we call Western Civilization as a continuation of the Roman empire.

We see in today's Gospel the inauguration of God's invincible, eternal kingdom. Jesus rides humbly into Jerusalem on a donkey as the conquering King. He earns the kingdom "not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death." (SC) We know that it is an eternal, everlasting kingdom because He rose from the dead. God the Father accepted His sacrifice and established His eternal kingdom. It is the most sure and certain thing there is. It cannot be defeated. It cannot be brought down. It will never self-destruct. But it is not an earthly kingdom.

The Israelites that lived during the time of Jesus' ministry had the same Daniel Scripture we had. There's a lie of modernity that believes that the people in the time of Jesus' visitation were stupid. They weren't as advanced as we were. Somehow, we're getting smarter and smarter. This lie usually accompanies an evolutionary, progressive mindset that believes we're creating, or can create, a perfect society. I'm sure you've heard the phrases, "the right side of history," or "the great reset." Humans, created originally in the image of God, have always been smart. If anything, we are getting less smart as the world decays to its inevitable end. I daresay Adam and Eve were much smarter than you or me.

Anyway, the Israelites were expecting God to establish a military, in time, kingdom that would expel the Romans and make the Roman kingdom look like small potatoes. Yet God does something unexpected. He sets up a spiritual kingdom. And its not composed of just one people group, or ethnicity, but it is composed of all nations. Jesus commands that His kingdom be established through Baptism and doctrine. (Matthew 28:19-20) This kingdom will expand by raising children in the kingdom and proclaiming Christ and Him crucified to new adult converts. (Romans 10:17)

When Jesus inaugurates His kingdom, he doesn't ride into Jerusalem as a mighty king or conquering hero. Even though He is those things, He rides in humbly on a donkey. He comes in gently, weeping over the hard-heartedness of His chosen people, Israel. However, the crowd does receive Him as a conquering hero and hero, however. They shout:

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (v. 9)

Son of David is the kingly title of God's Messiah who would come and save His people and establish His kingdom. Hosanna is a Hebrew word and means “save us now!” Hosanna in the highest rightly praises Jesus as God in the highest who will save His people. They were moved by the Spirit of God to praise Jesus as the conquering King He is as He inaugurates His kingdom. They didn't understand that Jesus would establish His kingdom by suffering and death on a cross. They abandoned Jesus in His final hours. Even His closest friends and disciples abandoned Jesus. Yet that is how it had to be. Only God the Son could face the horrendous enemies of sin, death, and the devil and defeat them on their own playground. Only God the Son could face the full wrath of His Father over the sin of the world. Only Jesus could win and establish God's eternal kingdom. And He won it humbly. And He continues to fill His kingdom humbly.

In the Service of the Sacrament, the second half of the Divine Service, we sing the Sanctus before receiving the Lord's Supper:

Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth;  
heav'n and earth are full of They 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.

We gather around God's altar and sing the same song that the Israelites sang when Jesus rode on a donkey into Jerusalem humbly. Now Jesus rides in humbly upon bread and wine and visits us in person. Jesus comes to you in His Word and visible Word of Baptism through the power of the Holy Spirit. But He comes to you *in person*, that is to say, *bodily*, in His Supper. The same body that rode the donkey into Jerusalem comes to you in bread and wine. And just like that day, He comes to you humbly.

We love John 3:16, and rightly so, but John 3:17 is as, and maybe even more, important than John 3:16:

“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

God isn't mad at you. He comes gently with forgiveness and the gift of eternity. To be sure, Jesus takes no delight in your sin, but He has conquered your sin and paid the price for it. And when you are forgiven and covered by His blood, He does take delight in you. What a wonderful thing to meditate on. The King of the universe takes delight in you!

But be warned. He's not a tame Lion! This is His word to those who stubbornly refuse Him and insist on their own way:

“Now therefore, O kings, be wise;  
be warned, O rulers of the earth.  
Serve the Lord with fear,  
and rejoice with trembling.  
Kiss the Son,  
lest He be angry with you and you perish in the way,  
for His wrath is quickly kindled.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in Him. (Psalm 2:10-12)

He comes now humbly so that you can take refuge in Him. And those of us who do so are blessed. But the proud and stiff-necked will be destroyed by the Son. Some are destroyed in this lifetime. Some will be destroyed when Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead. Every earthly kingdom will come to ruin. The earth itself will be burned up by fire. (2 Peter 3:10) And then the kingdom of God will finally be revealed in all its glory.

Now it is obscured in the world. In the church, Jesus tells us exactly what He is doing. He is sanctifying a people from all nations for Himself through water and word. In the world, Jesus acts through power. He may allow bad rulers and kingdoms to exist for a time, but He eventually overthrows them. The Babylon kingdom didn't stand. The Persian kingdom didn't stand. The Greek kingdom didn't stand. Even the mighty Roman kingdom didn't stand. Jesus put up with their evil for a time, but then He destroys every kingdom and person who does not submit to His authority.

In our daily lectionary we also read from Revelation this week. It is very fitting. It was talking about the second coming of Jesus when His kingdom will be revealed to everyone:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no

one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. (Revelation 19:11–15)

What beautiful imagery of our Lord revealing His glory and putting an end to all evil!

You may have heard a well-meaning Christian ask, “Jesus is your savior, but have you made Him Lord?” If you know them well enough, the correct response is to laugh heartily in their face. Jesus is Lord. How can you make Him something He already is? They are well-meaning because they are really asking, “why aren’t you living as a Christian?” That’s a fair question. And a reminder that you are a king’s man or king’s woman. You belong to the King. He bought you body and soul. You are His. And He has warned you that He is coming again. Peter asks a question about “what sort of people ought we to be in lives of holiness and godliness?” (2 Peter 3:11) A very fair question. Half the battle is remembering your baptism. Remember that you are a king’s man or king’s woman.

Let me leave you with this promise from Revelation:

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:3b–4)

What a wonderful promise to meditate upon! It is sure and certain because Jesus established His kingdom. It is an eternal, everlasting kingdom.

“Finally, brothers [and sisters], whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”  
(Philippians 4:8)

God will bless you richly as you meditate upon His Word.

In Jesus' name. Amen.