

Matthew 21.1-9

Ad te levavi, the 1st Sunday of Advent

2 December 2018

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today marks the beginning of the new church year. Another year with and under God's grace in Jesus Christ. Given us in Word and Sacrament. And there could hardly be a better series of lessons for us to take up than those that we have here. Because they teach us, once again, what kind of God we are to expect in this coming year. And not this year only, but every year until death calls us home or the Lord Jesus returns.

So hear again these words of pure Gospel: From the Old Testament lesson. There the LORD says, "I will raise up for David a righteous Branch....And this is the name by which He shall be called: The LORD our Righteousness." From the Epistle: "Salvation is now nearer to us than when we first believed." And from the Gospel: "Behold, your King is coming to you."

Oremus: sint placentes sermones oris mei, meditatio cordis nostri in conspectu tuo, Domine fortitudo mea et redemptor meus. Ps. 19.14 [19.15 ~~¶~~ iuxta hebr. alt.]

You can think of all sorts of analogies: Trying to go up on an elevator that's coming down. Walking the wrong way on the people conveyor at the airport. Driving the wrong way down a one-way street.

All of them as ridiculous as the next. From the 25th floor you can't get to the top of the Sears Tower on an elevator going down. The people conveyor at the airport moves much too quickly to make any headway on it going in the wrong direction. And you're sure to get smoked by oncoming traffic if you leave church and take a left off of 10th to head south on Lane.

And so what do we do? To spare our own sanity—maybe even our own life—we simply "go with the flow." We let the down elevator be the down elevator. We let the people conveyor heading to the opposite end of the terminal do its job. And from church we always go right onto Lane at 10th Street. Remember that. When leaving church, always right on Lane. Go with the flow.

And you will. In fact, you'll go to great lengths throughout your life not to buck what simply can't be bucked.

So then why would you ever get it wrong with God?

Sadly, many Christians do. Maybe even you do, too.

In fact, their "getting it wrong" is encoded in the very way they speak about faith and God. "I accepted Jesus into my heart." "I found the Lord." "I came to Christ." "I gave my life to God." "I re-committed myself to Jesus." You know the expressions. They're all around you. Turn on "Positive & Encouraging K-LOVE" and you can't go but a few minutes before your ears are filled with this poison. Remove it from your pre-selected channels.

But beginning with the Gospel today and through every reading we hear the protest of the Scriptures against this. Why? Because that God—that God you “give your life to;” that God you “commit your heart to”—that God is simply *not* the God of the Scriptures.

Israel didn’t decide one day to go out and “find a god.” Instead, the LORD of heaven and earth came to them and chose them and made them His people.

When the fullness of time came, the world didn’t “put on divinity” and rise to God. Instead, it was God who put on human flesh—who sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under Law, to redeem those under Law.

When the world needed nothing so much as righteousness to stand uncondemned before God, they didn’t procure it. They couldn’t. Instead, the Lord Himself did. He raised up a righteous Branch in the house of David and made Himself the righteousness of the world, the righteousness that world needs.

And it’s not we who hasten the Lord’s return and the consummation of our salvation. No. As Paul says, that day is simply drawing nearer under the Lord’s gracious providence and watch.

You see, when it comes to salvation, it’s all a down-elevator. It’s all a conveyor going to the far end of the terminal. It’s all a one-way street. All the motion is from heaven to earth, from God to His human creatures.

And on that street and conveyor and elevator it’s the Lord Himself who comes to us.

And thanks be to God for it! For the Lord does for us what we could never do by ourselves. The relationship between men and God has been fatally ruptured by sin—fatally for men, that is. So hapless and helpless are you to repair it that your very attempt to make a repair only makes it worse because your every attempt at a repair is nothing but faith in yourself and not in God and His promises to you in Christ. So what does the Lord do? He fixes it. See? God to you.

In the weakness of your flesh you’re singularly and exquisitely unable to keep yourself in the faith given you at your Baptism. So what does the Lord do? *He* keeps you in the faith. By *sending* His Holy Spirit to you through Word and Sacrament. See the pattern? God to you.

That’s the kind of God you have. That’s the kind of God you will have in this new year. And that’s everything that’s packed into that one little phrase from the prophet: “Behold, your King is coming to you.” In fact, you can make that the motto and slogan of the entire church year. “Behold, your King is coming to you.” Because here, every Sunday that’s exactly the event that’s celebrated. The Lord descends from on high and comes to earth. It’s like the down elevator is just stuck on ... down. Like the Lord keeps on tossing gift after gift Sunday after Sunday down the chute. And like He’s turned this nave into one big gift table.

As indeed He has.

Because what else is going on in the Invocation when Pr. Kerns says, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” and you make the sign of the Holy Cross? Boil that down to its core and it’s this: the Lord is reapplying your Baptism to you. He’s dressing you up again “in Christ,” as Paul says, and making Christ’s death your death, and the life He lives the life you live. Pure gift. From heaven. “Behold, your King comes to you!”

And what else is going on when the Absolution is spoken over you and God's holy Word is read and proclaimed? This is what Christ promises His pastors: "He who hears you hears Me." Great comfort for pastors who face down their mortal weaknesses and stand in fear before the people wondering if they're listening or not and what they're thinking about them. But an even greater comfort to you. Because to hear your pastor's voice is to hear Christ Himself. Christ, who absolves you of all your sins. Christ, who through His Word imputes to you every righteous deed He's ever done. Christ, who was nailed to a cross, whose blood was spilled, to pay for every last one of your sins.

And what else is going on when the Divine Service erupts into a blizzard of gifts and the very words of Christ's last will and testament are recited and repeated, Sunday after Sunday, over bread and wine. Words in which He says and promises: This is My Body. This is My Blood. For you. For the forgiveness of all your sins.

Fellow-redeemed: those words, "Behold, your King is coming to you," were not spoken by the prophet just for Jesus Christ's entry into Jerusalem to shed His blood, suffer, die, and be laid in grave for the sins of the world—they were spoken *even for you*. Even for you, to whom Christ continues to come. Every Sunday. And whenever you make use of His gifts of Word and Sacrament. To make over to you what He won on His Holy Cross—the forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation.

Man, just think about that. The God of heaven and earth. And He comes. To you.

No more trying to go up the down elevator. No more exhausting dashes on the people conveyor. No more wrong turns down the one-way street.

And no more failed attempts to repair what only God can repair. Because this is what you know: He has already made the repair. In the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. The King, who comes to you.

So now it's time to talk just a little about faith and what it does. Because that's the only response there can be to such a merciful and gracious God: faith.

Seeing Jesus coming to them. Seeing the great mercy and grace of God in sending His Son into the heated atmosphere of Jerusalem where He would surely be arrested, found guilty by a kangaroo court, and crucified. And seeing the great love of Christ for them, that He should die for sinners ... the crowd was stirred to great and fervent faith.

And this is how you can tell. When this King, meek and lowly, rode into Jerusalem, the disciples didn't say to each other, "Hey! Let's get back to the upper room in time for the Chiefs game!" And crowds making their way in haste along the dusty road from Bethany to Jerusalem didn't leave their church that day early to get on with the day's business. Instead, they stayed. And they sang songs of salvation. Songs of the Lord's promises to them: Hosannah! To the Son of David! Son of David, save us!—That's why you're here, right?—And they thought nothing of their own possessions. They took the cloaks off their own backs and laid them in the dust. And the decorations they had gathered they strewed before the Lord.

That's what faith does. It doesn't run *from*, but *to*, the thing it trusts. And it can't get enough.

Not like what faith looks for can run out. It can't. The down elevator keeps coming down. The gifts keep coming down the shoot. Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in Christ. Through Word and Sacrament.

You know those people we talked about before—those ones who haven't yet understood that you can't go up the down elevator—they don't have a reason to go to church. Because their faith isn't in a God and Lord who comes to meet them.

But that's exactly the kind of God you have—and hold in faith. And what does your faith do? It beats a path to wherever those gifts can be found. It thinks nothing of whatever else it has—season tickets, a yard that needs to be raked, a Sunday dinner that needs to be cooked. It leaves all that behind. If only it can have Jesus.

Behold, your king is coming to you!

Amen.

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