

† I preach in God's name for God's people. Let my words be from God and for God's people. **Amen**

Good morning.

I. TWO WEEKS AGO WE HEARD the judgment of this world. What looked like the judgment of Jesus — his crucifixion — is, in fact, the judgment of the world. What world could hope to endure after putting to death the innocent Son of God, the Christ, the King of Glory?

How much is the life of the innocent Son of God worth? What power does his sacrifice have? As innocent, as Man, as the Son of God, his sacrifice can never be tapped, for it is uncountably infinite, immeasurable, overflowing — pouring out into the hearts and minds and bodies of those whom he saves.

The Cross reveals that God *deeply, powerfully* desires to be with his people. And this Sacrifice of Jesus also reveals something fundamental to God's very being, to who God is — his sacrifice is not an exception, it's the rule. Who God is is *to be sacrificial*, is to give of Himself. Indeed, is this not what He has done from the very beginning, from Creation itself? Wasn't Him creating the cosmos itself sacrificial? Didn't He pour himself out in the very making of the world and of us? And yet, when God pours Himself out, that does not make him *less God*, or *less than* He was before — for this is his very nature. Because who He is is to pour Himself out for the sake of those whom He loves.

This is the great trinitarian mystery to which we have been let in on — He has always poured himself out for the sake of those whom He loves. What is more glorious and more good than the one whom you love — indeed, the one who *loves* you — giving up his very life for you?

II. LAST WEEK WE HEARD that Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey.

It's his triumphal entry into Jerusalem — exactly what we recall on Palm Sunday. But there is only one reason Jesus enters Jerusalem — to pour out his life in death for his people.

That's why we hear this passage during Holy Week & during Advent. We cannot separate Christ's coming into this world as an infant, born of the virgin Mary, from *the reason why* he came, which was to give up his life for his people. And remember again from last week, him giving up his life is not an outlier, not an exception, but the rule itself — God eternally pours himself out for those whom he loves. This is who God is. This is who Jesus is.

Christ's coming is inseparable from his death on the cross. In humility, Christ our King — the King of Glory — enters Jerusalem on a donkey.

How might any other king have entered Jerusalem? We would expect any other king to enter *victoriously*, which would mean a war-horse. What other way would there be for a king to enter Roman occupied Jerusalem than as a conqueror on a war-horse? Or to put it differently, what other king could have pulled off entering Jerusalem without a war party? What king would have lasted as long as Jesus — nearly a week — without a war party?

All this is to point out that Jesus enters humbly and *in peace*. For he brings the very peace of God.

This is perhaps one thing that distinguishes Christ's first coming and his return. We are, at present, invited into the very peace of God. But a time is coming — Christ's return — when that time will be up, when peace will no longer be available to those who have refused it. For now, this peace continues to be on offer to any who will receive it.

But the time will surely come — Christ will come — and his peace will only be for those who have *already* received it.

III. THIS MORNING WE HEARD that signs will precede Christ's return in glory.

These signs are there to signal that the Kingdom of God is near, that Christ's return is near — and that therefore our redemption is *near*.

These signs, for the Christian, however ominous they may be, however terrifying they may be, nevertheless represent *hope* for the believer. For Christ's return in glory is good for us and for the world — death, devils, sin, evil will be no more. Instead, King Jesus will reign over all of Creation; he will make all things new and right and good.

But that time is not yet. For our own part, we are nearing the end of Fall; daylight continues to fade. We are nearing the beginning of Winter; daylight will return, but only slowly, and with it, more cold. The seasons have meaning for us; they are not irrelevant to us. And, if we are prepared with fuel and furnace, our homes will likely keep us warm enough to last until the warmth of Spring.

But we could just as easily be unprepared, with not enough fuel, a poorly working furnace, and not enough warm clothing. If that is the situation we were to find ourselves, we might find ourselves unable to survive the season. Our lack of preparedness may indeed result in our own doom.

So, too, and to an even greater degree, our preparedness matters for our faith. That is the point of the signs and tumult about which Jesus warns:

34 "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. 35 For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth."

Jesus does not return in glory only to a select few. No one will escape his coming — and for the unfaithful & the faithless — his return will be to them as an animal caught in a trap.

And so, lest we be found faithless, we are to “watch ourselves” — keeping ourselves from dissipation. What does this mean? A traditional fireplace has a hard time heating a room. Where does most of the heat in a fireplace go? Up. The heat dissipates; instead of doing what we might like, and sending its heat outward, to warm a room and then the house, the heat from a fireplace tends to mostly go upwards, dissipating, not producing heat where is needed and desired.

So, too, we can be like a traditional fireplace. We burn, sure. We are alive, living, perhaps even very productive or interesting people. And yet, all (or most) of our energy, our work, effort, our time, our cares, and so forth, may be dissipated — dissipated into places that are not where God desires us to go or to be.

Just as Jesus warns, we may simply be too concerned with the cares and concerns of this life — work, money, chores, perhaps even with friendships or family. Or, just as bad — we may be caught up in sin — we may be caught up in disordered desires for sex, for drink, for pleasure.

Against all these things, the signs and tumult are given to us to remind us to be *alert, awake, watchful, prepared* — and for one thing only — the return of Jesus.

Children who have ever been left alone while the parents are out of the house understand this. They, too, have been given instructions. “Don’t open the door to strangers.” “No TV.” “Make sure you eat your lunch.” “When I come back, I had better find this house in ship shape.” The instructions are given; the parents leave.

What will the children do?

At first, the rules may be followed. But then, perhaps, the thinking sets in. “Well, they aren’t here. I could get away with a little TV. And what’s the harm in eating all these desserts first?” Pretty soon, the house is a mess. Wait, what’s that!? The sound of the car pulling up in the driveway? How quickly can the children cover their tracks?

Some of you may have some successful stories in getting away with this or that. Some of you may also have some rather unsuccessful stories.

None of us — except those who have kept the faith — will find success at Christ's return.

There is one thing that we take for granted every single day but which is nevertheless untrue: tomorrow shall come. For there is a day when tomorrow shall not come. There will be a day that will be the *last* day.

Death, grief, funerals remind of this fact for our lives. There is a day for each of us that will be our last day; there is a day allotted for each of us when there will be no tomorrow.

And so, the somberness we feel at funerals gives us a sense of the care with which we are to treat and approach life. This day may be all that remains granted to me.

And then there will be a day that comes, which may be today, or tomorrow, or the next, or sixty thousand years in the future, when there will be no more tomorrow for anyone. And so this is the danger, for us. We are lulled into thinking that this day is a long ways off — thousands of years away — and yet it may be in just a few moments.

So that we remain vigilant, our Lord gives us signs. I think the trouble is not so much that we do not see the signs, but that we become complacent to the signs we have been given. Hear them again:

25 And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world.

We might think: that could describe anytime! That could be today! And that's exactly the point. These signs are there to rouse us from our slumber, to awaken us to the reality that there is one but one chief thing for us — to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and to keep our faith in him.

And so, what I want to draw attention to is the nature of these signs. It's easy to think, there's nothing unusual happening with the sun, moon, and stars — nothing supernatural — and so, no need to pay attention to them. "Christ isn't coming yet." It's easy to think, there's not any more distress of nations today, than perhaps during the two world wars, so nothing to be worried about yet.

But this attitude misses, I think, the very nature of these signs. When the sun, moon, and stars collapse in on us, it's too late. When the all the nations are *that* distressed over the waves of the waters, it's too late.

What then? The *usual* signs of the sun, moon, and stars themselves remind us to keep alert, to be prepared.

I'm more attuned to the moon lately, to when it's a full moon and so forth, because Olive *loves* to see the moon. The moon, the moon! And so, just a few days ago, we were treated to a Supermoon, when the moon is a bit closer to the earth, and thus, seems a bit larger. It always seems a bit spookier that way, especially when it's not pure white, especially when it's got hues of orange. It's supposed to be a bit spookier.

One day, the moon will actually be *too* close. And its natural orbit is preparing us, reminding us, helping us to anticipate that day that is coming — the dawn of Christ in glory.

So, too, the eclipses are given; so, too, the tumult of the nations; so, too, the crescendoing waves. These regular signs are given for us to be *regularly reminded* of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, who does not want any one of us to be unaware about his return, or to be caught faithless.

And so, aware of these signs, cast aside sin, cast aside darkness, cast aside the cares of this life, which keeps you from dissipating and wasting your burning hot coals of faith.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. 8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant — indeed the servant who poured out his life for us. And so, we pour out our lives for our Lord and for one another.

† All Glory be to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.