

† 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 Jesus tell the disciples about the *end* of all things.

The beginning of the end of this age is the death of Jesus on the cross. What world can hope to endure after putting to death the Son of God? And so, this world stands condemned because it has killed the very one through whom the world was made. The end of this world is coming; this age is coming to an end. But, just as Jesus told his disciples, "these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once." There are things that must take place before the end. One of those things that must take place is the coming of the antichrist.

Perhaps the best analogy of the antichrist to come can be described in terms of a solar eclipse.

What is a solar eclipse? It is when the sun is eclipsed by the moon — the moon blocks the light of the sun from the earth — the sun's light is blocked and so all that can be seen is darkness. This is who the antichrist is — darkness & evil embodied in a man, one who seeks to block the radiance and brilliance of Christ, taking it for himself. As the end of this age draws to an end, the full darkness that will be is embodied in the antichrist, who wants the brilliance and radiance of Christ for himself.

But just as a solar eclipse is but for a moment, so, too, will the time of the antichrist be — temporary, finite, limited, short. And — though evil will be at its worst, yet still the light of Christ will pierce through even this blackest blanket of darkness.

II. ONE WEEK 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 Crucifixion 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?

III. THIS MORNING WE HEARD that Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey.

If this passage seems familiar to you, it's because it is. When do we also hear this passage? The beginning of Holy Week, on Palm Sunday. Then, we recall Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem — these shouts of Hosannah, these hymns of praise — only for the crowd, the people, the rulers, the priests to turn their back on him, reject him, and sentence Jesus to death by crucifixion.

It's crucial to our faith to understand that Christ's death on the cross was neither an accident nor a surprise. The cross is the center of God's unfolding design for the redemption of his people, for reuniting with his people. And so, the point and purpose of entering Jerusalem was simply this — for Jesus to die for his people.

Christ's coming — Advent & Christmas — is inseparable from his death on the cross — Holy Week, especially Maundy Thursday & Good Friday. And that's because *that's* why he comes — he comes to die. The one who is Light and Life himself comes to give up his life.

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.

There is at least one other obvious quality of God present in this passage and throughout Advent. Notice that our friend Matthew explicitly tells us: "This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet." This, like our candle-lighting hymn, reminds us that God fulfills his promises. Anything that he promises is certain. He must bring it to pass. He must fulfill anything that he has promised to do.

And so, as we have been hearing, there are left at least two things still unfulfilled — his second *advent*, and with his second coming, his promise to raise the dead and judge the nations.

Christ has died. **Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

We are confident, convinced, certain that Christ will come again, because he has promised to do so, and he is unable to *not* fulfill this promise to us. We are certain that Christ will raise the dead, because he has promised to do so, and he is unable to *not* fulfill this promise to us.

We are in a specific era, the time of waiting — the time between his first coming and his second. This era exists chiefly because of his great patience and his great desire for all those who will be saved to come to him. And because this is his great desire, it is also the very mission of the church — to share the news of Christ's first coming and the hope of his second coming. That is our mission and purpose — for those we encounter to know that Christ has come — and that he poured out his life out of love for us that we might have life *and* love — and that Christ will come again to raise the dead, to gather all those whom he loves to him, and to make all things right through his justice.

Confident that God pours himself out for those whom he loves, confident that God fulfills his promises, we return to our passage from Matthew.

Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey. Matthew explicitly tell us that this way of coming is *humble*. This is another of the great eternal qualities of God. Though he has all power and all glory and all knowledge, he never uses these against his people, but always and only *for* his people. And so, I think the question for today is this — what other way *might* Jesus have entered Jerusalem? If not a donkey, what way would he have come?

Because he is *by nature* humble, we can only imagine that he might simply walk — this was just a Sabbath's day's walk, after all. But if we change our question, how might any other king enter Jerusalem, then our answer quickly changes. 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 received it.

For now, there remain for us two things — to follow the example of the two disciples, and to follow the example of the crowds in *this* passage.

What did the disciples do? Obeyed the command of the Lord. It seems Jesus *divinely* knew that there would be a colt with his mother, and so he sends two disciples to retrieve them. They, in faith, trust his direction, and in obedience, return with the donkeys. So, too, is our lot. So, too, we are asked to step out in faith, to trust the Lord, to follow what he asks of us. And chiefly, he asks us to share the news of his first coming and of his second coming, to share the news that he poured out his life for us, and that he will return to fill us with his life.

What did the crowds do? The crowds shouted praise and sang psalms: “Hosanna to the Son of David!” This is our calling as well. We worship regularly, giving up of our time that we may bring God honor and praise and glory.

Finally, note that the two disciples carried out this command together, and note that the crowds gave praise together.

The Christian life is not meant to be alone, but together — for God has made we who are of one faith, one baptism, to be one body.

And so I turn to address both *Faith*, our confirmand, and this congregation. Faith, in confirmation, is beginning to take the promises made for her in baptism for herself. Let all the baptized now remember these promises:

P In Christian love you have presented this child for Holy Baptism. You should, therefore, faithfully bring her to the services of God's house, and teach her the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. As she grows in years, you should place in her hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for her instruction in the Christian faith, that, living in the covenant of their Baptism and in communion with the Church, she may lead a godly life until the day of Jesus Christ.

These promises, made on Faith's behalf, have become her own — just as they have become our own.

Faith is to continue in the *faith*. It will be her great joy and great responsibility to live up to her name — to live a life *of* faith. I do not take her name to be accidental nor without meaning — it is a great privilege for her to take her name seriously and confidently and to be a faithful Christian for life.

But she cannot live this life of faith alone. She must see faithful examples of Christians in the life of this congregation and in her family. She must see Christians in this congregation carry out their faith, pray for one another, forgive one another, give to one another, mourn together, and rejoice together. She must see Christians in this congregation desire to love our Lord Jesus, desire to love this congregation, desire to love our neighbors, and put this love into practice. She must see Christ's humility in our own lives, and she must see that we pour ourselves for one another, just as God does.

And so, brothers and sisters of Faith, I charge you to be these examples of faith for her, that Faith may, with all of you, live a life of faith until the very end, as we together long for, hope for, and expect Christ's return.

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