

"Someone's Coming"

Mark 11:1-10

November 30, 2014

1st Sunday in Advent

You've probably seen this scene in many dramatic or scary movies. There is a character approaching from the dark shadows or from a thick fog. This causes a time of uncertainty and apprehension, not only for you, the viewer, but for the other characters in the movie. You know someone is coming. You can perhaps see the size and shape of the person and can guess who it might be. If it is a scary movie, you might guess what this person is coming to do – something bad for the main characters since that's all that shadowy figures do in those kinds of movies. But you don't know exactly WHO is coming or exactly WHY this person is coming.

We begin the season of Advent today. As you know, the word, *advent*, means "to come," and we celebrate Someone coming. You may think, "Well, of course, *Jesus* is coming." You may think this is not anything like the movie scene described earlier. But it is. While many people know Jesus is coming, we still have to ask ourselves, "Who is this Jesus and why is He coming?" The crowds in our Gospel reading got it wrong. We must make sure that we don't get it wrong. Our eternal future depends on this.

Many people today, especially this time of year, think of Jesus coming as a tiny baby in the manger at Bethlehem at Christmas. Everyone likes a baby and we like this Baby even more because of the purity and poverty of His birth. The whole nativity is just so cute (we think) and this is shown by the number of nativity sets with which we decorate our houses at Christmas. (You don't see similar decorations set up to commemorate other events in Jesus' life, like His Baptism or Temptation.) Why did this Baby come? If you look at some Christmas cards or talk to some people, the answers can be quite vague. He came to bring some sort of peace, joy, and love to earth.

The crowds in our text today thought of Jesus coming as a Savior. This was shown in their happy shouts of “Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!”. “Hosanna” is a Hebrew phrase which means, “Save us now!” What did these people hope or want Jesus to save them from? Perhaps poverty, illness, or troubles of various kinds. They wanted Jesus to make them healthy, wealthy, and happy. I’m sure there are many people today who want a Savior that saves them from earthly troubles by giving them stuff. Is that what you look for or hope for in a Savior?

The crowds in our text also thought of Jesus coming as a King. They shouted, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David.” It’s pretty easy to speculate what they were looking for here. They wanted Jesus to kick out the Roman occupational government and to re-establish the kingdom of David. This would return Israel to its glory days as a world power. Jesus would reign from Jerusalem, dispense justice to Israel, and overcome all of Israel’s political and military enemies.

I’m sure there are many people today who think of Jesus coming as a King like that. They want Jesus to get rid of fallible, evil, or incompetent earthly governments and establish His own Kingdom here on earth. Some have even twisted the Bible to make it say that Jesus will reign for a 1,000 years here on earth. There is an appeal to that. Instead of being oppressed and persecuted, we Christians would have it made in Jesus’l earthly kingdom. He would get rid of all evil and injustice and turn the kingdom of this earth into the Christendom of God. Is that what you look for and hope for in a King?

Needless to say, the crowds in our text got it wrong as many people, even Christians, get it wrong today. The error is not so much in the identity of who was coming. The error was in the purpose of His coming.

Of course, Jesus came as a baby at the time we call Christmas, but for what purpose? It certainly wasn’t to serve as a humble model for cute displays or to serve as a symbol of some sort of vague peace, love, and joy. The Baby of Bethlehem is much more than a baby. He is the Son of God

incarnate – God in human flesh. Although He could have come as some spiritual being, the Son of God chose to come in human flesh because He had to in order to do you any good.

Humanity was and still is in deep trouble. Adam and Eve's rebellion against God in the Garden of Eden had doomed them and all their descendants to death – first, of their bodies here on earth and, second, of their bodies and souls in hell. Although God is a God of love who truly loved Adam, Eve, and all of humanity from them down to us, He is holy God who can and must punish sin and the sinner. He cannot overlook sin or just let the sinner go.

But God would have to come up with a plan that would allow Him to love and withhold punishment from sinners while, at the same time, being true to His holiness which required Him to punish sin. How would He do that? Since humans had sinned, humans had to be held accountable for that sin. Therefore, God sent forth His Son as a human being to stand in for us and take our place before God. Jesus, as true man, would fulfill all the requirements God had in His Law. He would do that for you, me, and all humanity and earn His acceptance of us. Then Jesus would take our place under God's wrath and anger and take the punishment for the collective sin of all humanity for all time. Jesus had to be a real human baby so that He could grow up to be a real human man and do this for us.

Jesus came as a Savior like the people of Israel thought and as many people today think. But He came, not to save us from poverty, pain, trouble and suffering here on this earth. He came to save us from much much more. To save us only from poverty, pain, trouble and suffering here on this earth and do nothing else would be like a doctor only saving a patient from the painful symptoms of a deadly disease. Left untreated, the disease would kill the patient even though he might be free of symptoms.

In the same way, Jesus has done more than save us from the symptoms of sin. He has saved us from sin itself. He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin when He gave His life for you and me on the cross. He has saved you from the sickness of sin and the disease of death by His death. In the

resurrection from the dead, which has been assured for you and me and all who trust in Him, we will be saved from every evil symptom of death. As the Scriptures promises to all who will believe, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Rev. 7:16-17)

Jesus came as a King like the people of Israel thought and as many people today think. But He came, not to rule territory and subjects by power and force, but to rule in the hearts and lives of people by mercy and faith. The coming kingdom of David mentioned in the text was already present in the person of Jesus Christ. It is present among us right now. The King rules in us individually and collectively by the working of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace: baptism by which we enter the Kingdom; the Word of God by which we live in His Kingdom; and the Lord's Supper by which we are sustained in His Kingdom.

Although we cannot see this King or this Kingdom now, that doesn't mean it is not real. Its reality will be shown for all to see on the Last Day. This King Jesus will return, not in weakness, but in power; not as a Baby in a manger, but as the Judge of all people. We and all people who have trusted in the Baby of Bethlehem and the Savior of Calvary will be judged and declare not guilty for the sake of Jesus' perfect obedience substituted for our sinful rebellion and His suffering and death paying the debt of our sin. Jesus' kingdom will be visible, powerful, and eternal and we will enjoy it forever and forever.

As you think of who's coming this Advent, remember to get the person AND the purpose right. Rejoice and celebrate the birth of the Baby Jesus in Bethlehem. Enjoy all of the things associated with that birth with all of the nativity scenes you can muster, if you wish. But remember that this Baby is the Son of God who came, not to decorate your nativity scene, but to be fully human so He could be your substitute.

Rejoice and celebrate the coming of a Savior. But remember that this Savior came, not to save you from suffering and sadness now by giving you stuff, but to save you from sin, death, hell, and the devil by giving Himself as a sacrifice for your sin on the cross.

Rejoice and celebrate the coming of a King. But remember that this King is not an earthy king of a political kingdom. He already rules your heart and life indirectly through Means of Grace while you live on this earth. He will come to rule the heavens and earth with you as part of that joyful heavenly Kingdom.

True man - true God - true Savior and true King. That's who's coming for Advent. Amen.