

"Is Everything All Right?"

Matthew 21:1-11

November 27, 2016

1st Sunday of Advent

Several weeks ago, long before Thanksgiving, I was driving home for supper. I noticed several houses, including my neighbor's house, decorated with bright and colorful lights. I thought to myself, "Is everything all right? Is this the new way to celebrate Thanksgiving? Have I missed a month and is it now the Christmas season?" Of course, everything was all right. The answers to my other facetious questions were both "no". People are just in a hurry to get to the Christmas season.

Maybe you felt the same when you came in to church this morning. You came to hear all about Advent, but, instead you heard in the Gospel reading about Palm Sunday. What's up with that? Is everything all right? Yes, everything IS all right. The Gospel lesson for today fits the theme of Advent, just not in the way people expect it to.

The people had come to welcome a King, the Messiah. So they formed a parade and began a celebration. They waived palm branches. They laid their cloaks on the road for Jesus, riding on a donkey, to ride on them. They shouted for salvation. They cried, "Hosanna to the son of David!... Hosanna in the highest." They believed that this Man, Jesus, had come to set them free.

But free from what? Free from Roman political control and military domination. Free from physical want or need. This King, this Messiah, would reestablish Israel as a powerful earthly kingdom. He would turn Israel once again into a "land flowing with milk and honey." He would meet their every want. He would provide for their every need.

Despite the fact that the people used all the right words and seemed to have faith, was everything really all right? Did they really know who this Jesus was and what He came to do? Three times prior to this text, Jesus had predicted His suffering and death by crucifixion. Jesus rode into the city humbly on a donkey. And, when asked, "Who is this?", The crowds responded, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." It was obvious from their words and actions that the crowds had no idea who this Jesus was and what his mission was to be. They thought he was a prophet who had come to restore the glory of the kingdom of Israel. I'm sure they were convinced five days later when, Jesus was hanging on the cross, that everything was not all right.

Are we any different? When it comes to Advent, don't we want the celebration, too? In our observance of Advent, we want to focus on the cuteness of the Baby in the manger or the glory of the King on the clouds. In other words, we want to feel good or excited like the Palm Sunday pilgrims. Since we are in a season that celebrates materialism, we allow our view of salvation to be influenced. We begin to believe, like the people in Jerusalem so long ago, that the Savior is coming to provide for our needs; grant us our desires; preserve us politically; and make us mighty militarily.

However, when we come to worship during Advent and hear about sin, repentance, and judgment and sing Advent hymns, often written in minor keys, we begin to wonder, "Is everything all right?" The crucifixion of Jesus Christ seems out of place. Talk of repentance and self-denial as we follow Jesus, especially in this time of partying and indulgence, seems to be a real "downer" and contrary to the spirit of the season.

"Is everything all right?" You bet it is. Our problem is not so much failing to understand the solution, but failing to understand the problem. Humanity's problem is not a political problem, economical problem, military problem, or material problem. Those are all symptoms of a much deeper problem: sin.

When we fail to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, by doing the evil He forbids or by failing to do all of the good He commands, we sin. When we fail to love our neighbor, not just a little or a lot, but as much as we love ourselves, we sin. We sin, not only by what we do, but also by what we say and even by what we think.

Sin does more than inconvenience us or make us feel guilty. Sin does more than make us suffer through various material, economic, political, or military problems which sin causes. Sin kills. Sin separates us from God, the source of all life, and, therefore, is the reason why we die physically on earth and the reason why we die spiritually in hell.

The solution is not in the giving of more stuff. It is not to be found in political power or military might. For Jesus to come and give us only these things would be like a doctor giving two aspirins to a

patient in pain from a brain tumor. While it might relieve the symptoms somewhat and temporarily, it doesn't solve the root problem.

Everything is all right because Jesus came to bring the right solution for the right problem. Jesus was born as a Baby in the stable at Bethlehem, not to be cute, but so He could assume human flesh for you. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday, not to start a political or economic celebration, but to go the way of the cross and take your place under the judgment of God.

Jesus is much more than a prophet. He is the Son of God and Savior of the world. That means His death counts for you, for me, and for all people in the world. His blood, shed on the cross, earns forgiveness for all of your sins and my sins and the sins of the entire world. That forgiveness establishes a new and right relationship with God for us. We are right with God and at peace with Him.

His resurrection does even more. Jesus rose from the dead to conquer death for you, for me, and for all people. His resurrection to new life gives us new life in our Baptism for this life on earth. We are free to live lives of love for God and to serve Him by serving our neighbor in love. His resurrection also gives us new life after death forever in heaven. We can live confident lives, without fear, knowing that our eternal destiny is assured.

As we begin our yearly celebration of Advent, do not get caught up in the cuteness of the Baby, the beauty of the lights and decorations, and the secular season which surrounds us. It is easy to be distracted by the celebration and miss the meaning of the season as did the residents of Jerusalem in our text today.

Focus on the real problem which our King came to address and not merely the symptoms of that problem which the world thinks are most important. The coming of our King ultimately has nothing to do with material goods, economic change, military might, or political power. The coming of our King has only to sin and its two chief consequences: death and hell.

Rejoice, not only that we know the real problem, but we know the real Savior, as well. He came, not to do what we thought needed doing, but to do what really needed to be done. He came, not to help with the symptoms, but to cure the disease. He took your sin upon Himself and gave you forgiveness instead. He took your death on the cross and gave you life for it. He rose from the dead so that you might someday enjoy the full and complete cure of sin as you live eternally with Him in heaven.

As you wait for Jesus to come again, make use of the means by which He nurtures and strengthens your faith, preparing you to celebrate His first coming and keeping you ready for His return. His means might not be flashy, but they are effective and may be easily neglected at this busy time of year. Hear His Holy Word, not only in Divine Service, but in the many special worship services during the Advent and Christmas seasons. Begin personal or family devotions with the special Advent devotional materials that our church offers. You will rejoice over His first coming as a baby in Bethlehem to suffer and die for the sins of the world. You will be encouraged in His continual coming in Word and Sacraments to bring forgiveness, life, and salvation to you. You will look forward in great anticipation to His final coming as King to gather us together and bring us to our eternal home in heaven.

Is everything all right? That's a good question. God has revealed to us in His Word the right problem: sin, not symptoms. God has sent to us the right Savior – not a social worker, not an economic advisor, not a politician, and not a military leader – but his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus implemented the right solution to the right problem: living a holy life fulfill the Law of God for us; dying a sacrificial death on a cross to earn forgiveness of all sins for us; and rising gloriously from the dead to life in order to ensure eternal life for us. We have the right blessings which we need the most: peace with God here and now and everlasting life with God there in heaven. Is everything all right? I would say that it is. Amen