

November 28, 2021

Luke 19:28-40

PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS IS ...

“A Matter of the Heart”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In our opening advent hymn (*O Bride of Christ, Rejoice*) we sang in verse three, “A humble beast He rides, Yet as a King presides; Though not arrayed in splendor, He makes the grave surrender. Hosanna, praise, and glory! Our King, we bow before Thee.” And in our advent sermon hymn (*Prepare the Royal Highway*) we sang in verse two: “God’s people, see Him coming; Your own eternal king! Palm branches strew before Him! Spread garments! Shout and sing! God’s promise will not fail you! No more shall doubt assail you! Hosanna to the Lord, For He fulfills God’s Word!”

Two things that I hope you noticed. First, these are advent hymns that we sing at this time of the year every year and still we feel strange that the gospel lesson is the same as it is for Palm Sunday. Second, in both of these advent hymns, the refrain is a Palm Sunday theme and word. They both use the familiar Palm Sunday word “Hosanna!” Do you happen to remember what that word means? It is a strong word that is a great burst of begging that comes from the depths of the heart. It means: “Please Save Us!” That should be the plea of us all. And that brings us to the overall theme for this advent season and the particular theme for this First Sunday in Advent: **Preparing for Christmas is ... A Matter of the Heart.**

What is the state of your heart? Is it prepared for the coming of Christ? The word “advent” means coming. The season of Advent proclaims the many arrivals of Jesus. When we think about the coming of the Savior the central focus is the cross. The people of the Old Testament were waiting for the Savior to come. In the New Testament we consider the Savior who has already come. As the people before us were waiting for the first coming of the King, we hold onto his first and are now waiting for the second. No matter what age the church has lived in she has been in a state of waiting for his arrival. The question is are we prepared? It has always been **A Matter of the Heart.**

There is a legend about an ancient village in Spain. The villagers learned that their king was coming for a visit. For a thousand years, a king had never bothered to come to their village since it was so small and insignificant. Everyone was full of excitement. Since many of the people made their own wines, they decided that upon the arrival of the king they would each bring a large cup of their choice wine to the town square and pour it into a large vat and offer it to the king to drink thinking that it would be the best wine ever tasted.

The people climbed a small stairway and poured their large cup of wine through a small opening at the top of the vat. It was full and the king arrived. He was brought to the town square and given a beautiful silver cup and was told to draw some wine which symbolized the very best the villagers had to offer. The king placed the cup under the spigot, turned the handle, and then drank the wine, but it was nothing but pure water. The king was stunned to learn that every villager could not bring themselves to sacrifice their wine for him and so they thought that a little water would make no difference and no one would notice. What they did not anticipate was that everyone would do the same thing.

It may be only a legend but it teaches us something about ourselves. There can be a great difference between what we pretend to be on the outside and what we really are in our hearts. The people in the

Spanish village did not have a heart for their king. On the outside we can pretend to be excited about the King but on the inside there can be a heart that is sadly disconnected and woefully unprepared - a heart that does not believe in the gift of forgiveness and does not live in Jesus. Then there are the Pharisees who did not bother to disguise themselves at all. They had no problem with voicing their rejection of Jesus. And finally, there was the whole multitude of his disciples who were rejoicing and praising God for the mighty works they had seen. As Jesus was drawing near Jerusalem riding on a colt our lesson says:

... the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

What a contrast! On the one hand, you have disciples rejoicing and praising God, while on the other, you have the so-called religious leaders of Israel rejecting him. These religious leaders will have Jesus crucified. The disciples will be in a spiritual mess when he is arrested. They will feel as if all is lost. This serves as a powerful warning to all of us as we find ourselves waiting for our King to arrive. If you think you are standing firm be careful that you do not fall.

We have to ask the question: what kind of wine is it that we are pouring into the vat for our King to drink - is it water? And what shall we say about those strange words of Jesus regarding stones? He says, "I tell you, if these were silent [the disciples], the very stones would cry out." Jesus interprets these words as he draws close to the city, sees it, and then weeps over it. He says in verses 41-44:

Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when *your enemies* will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they *will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.*

What does it mean that stones cry out, or that one stone is not left upon another because the people did not recognize in Jesus the coming of the Savior? There is a point, after people reject the coming of the Savior, where stones must cry out and are not left upon another because the people have refused the gift of God and there are hardly any left to rejoice and give praise for the gift of salvation. The advent of Jesus then becomes a horrible judgment where the building of stones crumbles to make a noise that is a witness.

The day will come when heaven will open and the one sitting on the white horse who is faithful and true will come in righteousness to judge the living and the dead. The armies of heaven will follow him. And it says in Revelation 19:11-16 that with the sharp sword that comes from his mouth "he will strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, 'King of kings and Lord of lords.'"

So what kind of a king do you want? What kind of a rule do you wish to forever live under? These are matters of the heart. Will ours be a heart that is a vat filled with nothing but water rather than the sweet wine of sorrow over sin and faith in the cross? Will it be a heart of faith that anticipates the coming of the King who was born in Bethlehem to bring peace between humanity and God by his self-sacrifice, burial, and resurrection from the dead? Will it be a heart ready for his second coming? May God work in our hearts by the power of his Holy Spirit in the word and sacraments. This is preparation in the truest sense. But there is no preparation when we do not use the means that God has given us.

May it be then that we cry out “Hosanna! Please Save us!” May we greet him with broken and contrite hearts that plead for his deliverance while knowing and believing that he gave himself unto death as the only sacrifice that truly saves us. May our cry of “Hosanna” be comforted in the washing away of our sins in the blood of our true King who loves us with an everlasting love and who wishes to rule us in everlasting righteousness.

As we prepare ourselves for his advent, may we look back and forward in faith. May his love well up within us love for him and one another. And with the voice of a humble spirit may we join the Jerusalem throng of old saying: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! The Lord is God and he has made his light to shine upon us!”

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott