

The Refrain that *Always* Applies  
Luke 19:28-40  
First Sunday in Advent  
December 2, 2018

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, “The whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice..., “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Sometimes, when people argue that theology isn’t applicable to daily life, it’s because they instinctively notice that the theological truths of God’s Word seem to transcend our timelines. Our day planners and mobile device calendars all have 15-minute increments, and we want each little 15-minute problem to be handled or solved in time for us to move on to the next one. It’s rather difficult for us to look at the ‘big picture’ of life and salvation and eternity when we’re so focused on each little irritant.

The one who is struggling with physical affliction wants it solved ‘now,’ while it seems God’s plans never include ‘now.’ The one who is wrestling with sin and temptation wants such wrestling to be alleviated ‘now,’ but it seems God’s plans never include ‘now.’

So, in desperation, we come to Sunday morning hoping to get the ‘now’ answers we’re looking for. We show up in church on this First Sunday in Advent expecting to hear something about looking forward to Christmas and how that anticipation can bring

calm or joy to my afflicted life; but, instead, we get this reading from Palm Sunday. We come expecting to hear something perhaps about a young virgin riding on a donkey to Bethlehem and instead we get the grown man, Jesus, riding on a donkey toward Jerusalem and the events of Holy Week. “How does any of this apply?” we ask, “not only to the church calendar, but to my daily life?”

Here’s how it applies: God’s theology transcends daily life’s timeline not in the sense that it doesn’t know life’s timeline (after all, Christ lived his earthly life *in* time and history), but in the sense that God’s Word and promises universally apply to every moment of history and our daily lives.

When we in our tunnel vision say, “This doesn’t apply,” God says, “Now, wait a minute... you just ended the church year with an eager anticipation in Christ’s *second* coming; you now enter a new church year with anticipation of Christ’s *first* coming. Are not both of those addressed in Christ’s procession into Jerusalem? Did he not enter Jerusalem and die on the cross to bring to culmination the Old Covenant that awaited his first coming? Did he not enter Jerusalem and die on the cross and usher in the beginning of this New Covenant that awaits his second coming? And,” God says to us, in applying his theology to every day of life, “is this not the same Christ who enters to the same shouts and acclamations each and every Lord’s Day to bring to you and your timeline the benefits of the

cross, forgive your sins, and strengthen you in patience and faith as you long for his glorious return?”

In other words, the occasion on which Jesus heard the refrain, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” that occasion may be once in history, but the theological truth that Jesus is our coming Lord and coming King, that applies to every day of life... to the little irritants and to the big picture. And, the fact that this occasion in history applies to His first coming, His second coming, and His weekly coming... that shows how universally this refrain, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” ... how universally that refrain ought be cherished in your daily life’s timeline as the comfort for all Christians.

Let me give you an example:

The one who suffers from physical affliction says, “Where is God? It seems like he created the world, then is letting it wind down and I’m caught in the middle.” This text responds to them, “Your God thought so much of you and your salvation – not only from sin, but also from sin’s little irritating consequences – that He came in human flesh and set his face to Jerusalem and marched to the cross and took your punishment and became your atoning sacrifice.”

And, the one bitter about their current affliction says, “Well, a lot of good that does me! Meanwhile, here I am struggling with affliction and he’s nowhere to be found. Couldn’t he just come and

heal me and give me a better life now.” And the text again responds, “He who once came in history riding in humility on a colt will come again in glory riding on the clouds. And the same refrain, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’ will reverberate to the far ends of heaven and earth and he will vindicate all who, through their toil and tribulation and suffering and even physical death have trusted in and long awaited him who promises ‘I am coming quickly.’”

And, the afflicted Christian isn’t perhaps so bitter now, perhaps comforted by the future hope, but is simply desperate and longing in the present reality. And so he/she says, “But, until he comes in glory, what now? Where is my comfort and strength now?” And this text again responds, “The one Who will come again in glory so that the world will bow down to Him, Who once came in humility so that the world did not receive him, that same Jesus even now is coming to you in a mysterious gift the world does not recognize but the *Church* bows down and adores. Not only *will* he strengthen; He *now* strengthens. Not only *will* he sustain; He now sustains – with a medicine nothing short of his own body and blood, so that the whole church from every corner of heaven and earth can even now – in the midst of our longing and our suffering – can say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

What’s true for the one who is suffering affliction is also true for the one in sin and temptation. Christ will come again in glory, and

*all* sinners – whether penitent or impenitent – will be made part of that chorus, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” The impenitent will be forced to admit and confess it, and – now too late for their salvation – they will echo that refrain through weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But, the penitent will know their sin and worry – “How do I know he will not now condemn me in His great glory? When he comes again and raises me and stands me before the throne of God, how do I know he will count me as holy enough, sanctified enough, ‘Christian enough’?” Our text comforts, “Dear child, the one who will come again to judge the living and the dead is the same one who came in great humility in order to save you from your sins – “call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.” Notice, it is your sin that is the great enemy, not you, and so he saves you from your sins. Be of good cheer, for as He listened to those crowds sing, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,’ He was marching to the cross for your sake, to save you from your sins.” And the penitent, perhaps comforted, but still not sure that the death of Christ is strong enough to overcome his/her sin, responds, “Yes, but my sin seems to cling to me; I can’t get rid of it. It’s all consuming. Does this not mean that I am not strong enough and, therefore, not saved?” And the text again replies, “Dear child, *you* are not the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Your Christ is. And for you, he still today comes. ‘This is my body, this is my blood – for you, for

your forgiveness, to save you from your sins and strengthen you as you await my glorious return.’ And, dear child, certain of that promise, you have the great joy each and every week of your struggle against sin... the great joy of proclaiming with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, “Blessed is He, Blessed is He, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Friends, that’s how transcendent above and yet how universally applicable to the daily life of your timeline is the work of our Christ and the doctrine of His Word. And, that also means that’s how transcendent above and yet daily applicable is the outcome of his work. Did you notice in the text what well-known refrain *follows* the words, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord”? It’s this well-known refrain: “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” When Christ came in lowly birth there was now peace between God and man – “Peace on earth,” God and sinners reconciled – and therefore the angels could sing “Glory in the highest.” When Christ first came to Jerusalem on his way to the cross, there was now being fulfilled the work needed for peace between God and man, so that the faithful could sing “Peace in heaven, Glory in the highest.” When Christ comes again in glory, there will still be peace between God and his elect in heaven and on earth, so that the Church whom he has vindicated may sing “glory in the highest.” And during this Advent Season, we voluntarily put away that glad refrain just long enough to be reminded that *because of Christ’s first coming*, the rest

of the year and the rest of our lives we may anticipate his *final* coming by joining together each Sunday around his altar and delighting in his *weekly* coming, “Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace good will toward men. We praise Thee, We bless Thee, We worship Thee, We glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for thy great glory.”

But, if we are to learn how to rightly sing of His great glory, and if we are going to learn how applicable these comings of Christ – first, last, and weekly - are to daily life, we must also learn how to expect to find them and how to interpret that glory. To paraphrase Luther, the teaching of Palm Sunday, especially here in the season of Advent, includes this basic question: “What kind of king do you expect?”

The world would be quite willing to expect the Christ of the Christians if he came in glorious and wondrous ways they could marvel over with the eyes. But, as our text reminds us, He saves that visibly *glorious* coming for the Last Day and instead comes in humility – to be received as glorious by faith and not by sight. Our Old Testament reading cries out with that age-old prophecy, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made... and this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’” And that prophecy sounds so glorious, so grand... just as does the refrain of Zechariah in our introit, “Behold, your king is coming to you, righteous and having salvation.” It all

sounds so *glorious* that the world asks, “What must *that* look like?”... but, how do those words of Zechariah continue, “humble and mounted on a donkey.”

Indeed, the world that would be quite willing to wait for a glorious Christ is not so focused on a Christ who glories in humility. You live in a world whose desire for glory produces sights and sounds that always tempt and distract you and detract from the Gospel of the theology of the cross. It’s as if the world says to you, “A God who seems to let death have the last word? - why would you believe in Him? A God who allows the devil’s temptations to continue? - why would you find solace in him? A God who weekly comes, but only to faith and not to sight? - why would you waste your life believing in him? We’ve got better answers, better Christs, a better life for you, in which temptation can be redefined as ‘normalcy’ and suffering can be redefined as ‘a heroic battle waiting for the cure that is bound to come if only man’s wisdom has enough time to find it’... and holidays can be redefined as glorious days of the year in which there are magically no problems and pain, headache and heartache.’

Isn’t this exactly what Jesus warned us of – false Christs who promise alternative forms of holiness and eternal life? Didn’t we hear Jesus say this in our text just a few weeks ago when he warned, “See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying ‘I AM!’ and they will lead many astray... And if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it.

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard.”

Friends, that warning is just as important in anticipation of hearing anew the report of his first coming as in anticipation of beholding the Second coming, isn't it? This Advent season – not just each Advent Sunday or even each Advent Wednesday, but every day of this season and every day of your daily life – the world will point you and your afflictions and your wrestling with temptations to false christs, false promises, false comings, false gospels. Yet, the true Gospel of the true refrain that once rang out in Jerusalem continues to comfort and encourage you that you can come to the altar of God and, in patience for the Lord's glorious return, you may declare the praises of him who once saved you and now serves you in the divine and mysterious humility adored by faith, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD.”

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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December 2, 2018