

-Shepherd of the Mountains

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The First Sunday of Advent
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“The Second Time Around”

Text: Mark 1:1, 7-10

1 . . . Jesus . . . said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. . . .

7 And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. 8 And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. 9 And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! 10 Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!"

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:2).

It would have been buried back on page six. *Maybe. At best. The story.*

Certainly it wasn't “front page” stuff. After all, it was a big news week. The Dow (Dow Jones Industrial Average) closed above 24,000 for the first time in history. A San Francisco jury found Garcia Zarate *not guilty* of involuntary manslaughter even though a bullet from the gun *he* fired killed Kate Steinle. The Senate passed sweeping tax reform,

approving the boldest rewrite of the nation's tax code in more than thirty years. NBC News terminated its \$20-25-million-dollar-a-year “*Today*” show co-host - Matt Lauer - for “inappropriate sexual behavior.” Oh, and not to mention, of course, here in the White Mountains, a mercury spill shut down Blue Ridge Elementary school for an entire day.

Yes, had it happened in *Phoenix*, the *Arizona Republic* would have buried it even deeper than *that* - back behind the News, Arizona Living, the Classifieds, Travel, Arts and Entertainment, Business, and Sports. Back in the *Local* section. The *story*, I mean. *You* heard it. From “Guest Columnist” Mark - no last name. All that about Jesus . . . riding into Jerusalem . . . on a *donkey!* - on the *colt*, no less, of a donkey . . . and the people throwing palm branches in his path and hailing him as their king!

As far as the Israel [emphasis added] *Republic* was concerned, all right, Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem would have been - at the very *best* - a *local* news story. Sure there were some *crowds*. And, yes, there was some minor property damage - no looting per se, but certainly all those branches that were whacked off other people's trees so they could be laid in his path. And there sure was a lot of *noise* - all the shouting - “*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!*”

But, really? This whole *parade* thing? It was strictly the “Amateur Hour,” wasn't it? I mean, in all honesty, Jesus' handlers could have done a much better job of staging the entire event!

Where, for instance, was the rest of the parade?

Where were all the support vehicles?

Where were all the celebrities? (When the cameras panned the crowd there wasn't a single recognizable face among them; they were all just plain folks.)

Where were all the body guards; the security detail; the imposing police presence; the soldiers, even?

And, of course, where - at the very head of the parade - was the fancy *car*? Where was the *stretch limousine*?

Okay, where, even, just “the *equestrian units*”? Seriously, now, a *donkey - one donkey*? And a *baby donkey*, at *that*, not even one *full grown* - a colt, the *foal* of a donkey?

Talk about your *budget* operation! As I said, talk about your “Amateur Hour” episode!

Clearly, Jesus’ handlers - his first disciples - needed a “do over.” Surely they could have done better - in the theme of our meditation this Advent morning - “the second time around.”

And yet, for all that, the crowd *loved* it, didn’t they? They couldn’t get *enough* of it! They were wild with enthusiasm. They couldn’t contain their joy. They were getting to see Jesus - the one who had just raised poor Lazarus from the dead!

They poured out from Lazarus’ hometown of Bethany - they poured out from the surrounding area - as soon as they heard that Jesus was heading into the city - the *Holy City*, Jerusalem. They lined his path. They strained to get a good view of him. They eagerly laid down their cloaks and palm branches in his path. They proclaimed him their king, the *Lord’s* own King, the promised Messiah of the house of great King David: “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! They shouted at him to save them: “Hosanna! (“Lord, save us!”) Hosanna in the highest!”*

They hailed him as their future. But in *their* minds - ironically - that meant they looked to him to take them back to the *past*, back to the way things were when great King David was on the throne. They anticipated a great victory in the Holy City. They expected him to overthrow the Romans. They expected him to toss those foreign rulers out on their

ear! They expected him to set up *his* reign, *his* kingdom.

Now, it didn’t go at *all* the way they *expected*, of course. But then, how *could* it - when they were expecting the wrong *king*?

Oh, Jesus was a king, all right; but he was a king unlike any other! He was a ruler unlike any other earthly ruler.

And that’s because He *wasn’t* any other *earthly* ruler. He wasn’t an earthly ruler, at *all*. “*My kingdom is not of this world,*” in only a matter of days would make clear to the Roman “king,” the *earthly* “king,” Pontius Pilate (John 18:36).

So, no, Jesus wasn’t just going to set up his earthly reign - he wasn’t going to set his army’s physical headquarters - in Jerusalem. He wasn’t going to overthrow the Romans with brute force. No, he was going to establish his kingdom - just as He had said: “*The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life*” (Mt. 20:18-19).

What? That’s the best you’ve *got*, King? That’s your *plan*?

And, indeed, it was. He would be betrayed by a friend, operating under the cover of darkness, while many of those in the crowd this Palm Sunday day were sound asleep in their beds. And perhaps because “the wheels of *justice* turn *slowly*,” in the fastest *miscarriage* of justice ever, he would be railroaded before the High Priest, and “King” Herod, and Pontius Pilate in the quickest possible succession. He would be stripped, and scourged, and flogged, and crowned with a kingly wreath of thorns. He would be impaled on a cross, where he would be mocked and scorned and derided by all who passed hard-heartedly by. He would be declared to be a king - “*Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews’*” (John 19:19).

The *first* time around.

This ragtag little “parade” we have this morning was just the beginning. Welcome to Advent. Yes, *Advent*.

Last week? Oh, *last week*, of course, *we* were celebrating Lutheran Women in Mission, we were celebrating the LWML. However, everyone *else* in God’s church - everyone who follows the *Church Year*, that is - was celebrating the end of the world. Jesus’ coming again. The second time around.

Yes, last Sunday - the last Sunday on the Church’s calendar, the last Sunday in the Church Year - was Christ the King Sunday. Christ the *true* King. Christ the *one-and-only* King. Christ the Lord of both heaven and earth. Christ the Ruler. Christ the Victor.

And you wanna’ talk about your *staging*! The *second* time around, [Christ will come] on the *big* stage - “*Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other*” (Mt. 24:29-30).

The “*Son of Man*.”

The Son of *God*!

But that was just the *problem*, wasn’t it - the *first* time? Oh, we’re talking about the *same Jesus*. . . . *coming* . . . only in a totally different *way*!

The first time? The “*Son of Man*” - the Son of *God* - they can’t be separated, after all - came in gentleness, came in humility, came in meekness. Let’s just go ahead and say it: came *incognito*. Came *veiled*. Came *camouflaged*. Came completely enshrouded in humbleness - *meanness*, to use the old King James word - in humility.

Therefore, frankly, to be honest, He was hard to see. *Impossible* to see - with the *human eye*! Without the eye of

faith, that is.

Oh, He showed Himself for all to see; but not all saw. *Most*, in fact, did *not*.

Some simply never could get their eyes to focus. Others rubbed their eyes in disbelief, and turned away. Many more simply refused to look, going their so-called “merry way,” believing what they wanted to believe.

Oh, and it wasn’t just men. *Satan* never saw it, either. Or rather He *saw* it, but he let Himself believe otherwise. When he saw the “*Son of Man*” mocked and flogged and crucified - when He saw Him *die* - He and all his legions were sure they had won. Indeed, the party was “on” in Satan-town. Jesus was dead. He was down for the count!

But three days into their celebration, Jesus got back up off the mat. He arose. He was alive. He stopped by specifically to *show* them. Death had been defeated. *They* had been defeated. The “*Son of Man*” undeniably was “the Son of *God*,” the King of all creation, the Lord of heaven and earth - and everything *under* the earth!

But don’t blame Satan, as I say. That was just the way things were - that was just the nature of things - the *first* time.

Oh, but not *the second time around*! No, it will be like that powerful scene in your favorite, feel-good high school football movie, *Remember the Titans*. It’s the Northern Virginia Regional Championship game, and assistant Coach Yoast has just learned that the all-white Virginia coaches’ Hall of Fame board has “fixed” the game against his team and its new African-American head coach, that they’ve pressured the refs to engage in biased officiating against his Titans. After boldly warning the head official that he will go to the press and expose the scandal unless the game is called fairly - a move that he knows will cost him his chance at the Hall of Fame, Coach Yoast gathers his defense around him and orders them:

“All right, now, I don't want them to gain another yard! You blitz.... all... night! If they cross the line of scrimmage, I'm gonna take every last one of you out! You make sure they remember, forever, the night they played the Titans! . . . Leave no doubt!”

The second time around? “You make sure they remember, forever, the night they played the ‘Titans’” - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The “*Son of Man*” and the Son of *God*!

So whereas the *first* time, Jesus came in gentleness, in humility, and in meekness, the *second time around*, He ‘s going to come in glory, in splendor, and in majesty. Yes, *the second time around*, it’s not going to be buried back on page six. Not *this* story. It’ll be “*front page*” stuff. Big news. The second time around, everyone will see; not a single person will be able to deny. . . . that Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary, is the Son of the Most High God, too. Is God - God in the flesh. God and Lord. Lord of heaven and earth, who in his defeat of the devil at Calvary has won salvation for all who will put their faith and trust in Him.

The second time around, He will leave no doubt! The trumpet will sound. The voice of the archangel will boom. Graves will open. The dead will rise. Every eye will see Him: “*Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.*” (Rev. 1:7). Every knee will bow and every tongue confess - “*in heaven and on earth and under the earth*” - “*that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil. 2:10-11)

Why - after all the royal pageantry of Christ the King Sunday - does Advent take us all the way back to the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? Because it reveals to us God in human flesh. The long-awaited Messiah and King, come to save His people from their sins. Come to give them a hope and a future.

What will that future look like? Frankly, fellow “Israelites,” many of us might imagine it just like a return to the “glory days” of our past - as a country, as individuals, and as a church. A day before Roe v. Wade legitimized the murder of yet-to-be-born children. A day before Columbine, and Sandy Hook, and Ft. Hood, and Virginia Tech, and Mandalay Bay and Sutherland Springs. A day when America seemed greater than it does today. A day when you and I still had our hopes and dreams. A day when our future was in our hands. A day when we felt more secure than has been possible since 9/11.

What would we like to see Jesus restore for our futures? The *real* question is what do we *need* to have Jesus restore for our future?

And *that*, He’s already done - “*hope and a future*” (Jer. 29:11). For where there is forgiveness, there is also life and salvation. *That*, He’s already done - with His perfect life and sacrificial death - the first time.

So while we wait for Him to come again, we celebrate that climax of His first coming. We ponder that great mystery of His cross. We give the Father thanks for giving us His Holy Spirit who gives us faith in His Son Jesus. We live and move and find our very being in Him - the “*Son of Man*” and the Son of *God* - who mysteriously still comes to us in Water and in Word, in wafer and in wine. And we testify in word and deed to Him who has come, who does come, and who will - the second time around - come again.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.