

28 November 2004  
Advent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

## Jesu Juva

“Hosanna! Lord, save!”

Text: Matthew 21:1-11

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

Part of the Thanksgiving Holiday weekend – after the day of feasting – is the day that here in America has come to be known as “Black Friday.” It is called that not because of all the diets that were been blown the day before, and not because of the mood of the shoppers that descend upon stores and have to wait in long lines, and not because they do so before the sun even comes up! No, it is because this is the day that retailers hope the ink in their ledger books will turn from red to black. This is the day they hope they will stop running in debt and start making a profit. All the shopping and buying that is done the first eleven month of the year is not enough to do that. Retailers know it is Christmas that will make all the difference in the world.

Well, what retailers have only recently discovered is something that the Church has known all along. Christmas does make all the difference in the world. And it does so not because of our Christmas cheer, or our wishes for peace on earth – but because Christmas leads to its own “Black Friday.” The Friday on which the blood of Christ, shed on the cross, turned our ledgers of sin from red to black. On that Friday, the ledger of our debt of sin to God was paid in full by the perfect sacrifice of Christ. All the work and effort of all our lives could never have been enough. It is Christ that makes all the difference in the world.

That is why we begin the Church Year on this First Sunday in Advent as we do – with the reading of Jesus entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. As we begin to look forward to Jesus coming as the babe of Bethlehem, we hear of the reason why He came – that Friday; Black Friday; Good Friday. And so as Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey, the crowds cry out “*Hosanna!*”, which means “*Lord, save!*” And that is why our Lord has come. Exactly why. Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee, Jerusalem, Calvary. Everywhere He goes, everything He does. All for one purpose. To save. To ascend the cross and pay the price. The dreadful price our sin costs. We may think our sin a bargain – so much fun and guilty pleasure at so little cost! Until we look there, and see the cost. Red blood for black sinners to wash us whiter than snow. To save us from our sins.

Ah, but there's the catch. You see, there are lots of things we want to be saved from, and would like *Jesus* to save us from – but is our sin usually high on that list? Saving from our fears, from our struggles, from our problems, yes! Saving from our sins, *not so much*. And so, as we heard in the Holy Gospel, when Jesus entered Jerusalem that day and the crowds shouted Hosanna, many, no doubt, wanted Jesus to save them from the Romans, not their sins. A practical Saviour; a problem-solving Saviour; might I even say a *retail* Saviour? That's what they wanted. . . . And doesn't the same hold true today? And so perhaps we want saving from the commercialism and debt that has overwhelmed Christmas . . . but not from the greed and love of things that caused it. Many today want saving from abusive relationships, rampant divorce, unwanted pregnancies, and diseases . . . but not from the lust and the imaginations of our minds that causes all of that. Crime, terrorism, gangs, and guns, are all high on our lists to be saved from . . . but not the hatred and prejudice and pride that lies beneath these things. A *retail* Saviour is really what we want. Take what we want of Him and leave the rest. A *practical* Saviour. To make *our world* a better place. To take away the problems. To make all the difference *in the world*.

But again, there's the catch! Because the problems are not in the world. What we see in the world are just the symptoms. The disease is not out there, it is in here (*pointing to heart*). It is the sin that lives in each one of us. The sin in us that *likes* greed and lust and pride and hate and vanity and self-centeredness . . . just not the *consequences* of those things. The sin in us that thinks what a great place this world would be if only everyone thought like me and did what I want. The sin in us that blinds us to our own sin. But the Saviour who comes to us, the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, has come not to save us from what we *think* we want saving from, but what we *really* need saving from. Not to save a part of us, but to save all of us. To save us from our sin.

Now that fact causes some to turn on Jesus, and to turn away from Him. Instead of picking up Palm Branches, they turn their backs. Shouts of Hosanna quickly turn to shouts of Crucify Him! Instead of hailing Him as King, they enthrone Him on a cross. And still today. Even here, among us who ought to know better. When the Law is preached, convicting us of our sin, the preacher is meddling. When our sin is exposed, we'd rather make excuses than repent. When told the end is near and to awake from the sleepiness and carelessness of our sin and watch for the coming of our Lord, we'd rather hit the snooze button. Yes, we too have turned away from our Saviour who comes to us. For His coming is not always convenient, not always nice, not always just how we want it.

And so on this First Sunday in Advent, it is good for us to take our place with the crowds in Jerusalem. To look for our King who is coming to us. For have we become too

comfortable with our sin? Might we be too complacent with our lives? We need saving from our sin, as hard as it might be. And so we shout Hosanna! Lord, save! Save me. This is also what we prayed in the Collect of the Day earlier: *“Stir up, we implore you, your power, O Lord, and come that by your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and be saved by your mighty deliverance . . .”*

And that is what our Lord does. He comes. He comes to us. Not in threatening power, that we cower in fear. But in gentle power, that we may also come to Him. Do not confuse His gentle power with weakness. He comes to do in the hidden power of God what we cannot do with all the power of men. And so He comes as a baby in a manger. He comes riding on a peaceful donkey. He comes and ascends a cross for sins not His own. He comes back from the dead. He comes to His frightened disciples. He comes and gives the peace of sins forgiven. And He comes the same today. He comes to you. He comes in His Word. He comes in the baptismal water. He comes putting His body and blood in bread and wine. Gentle power, but the power of God; the power of sins forgiven; the power of peace. He comes to us now, as He came in Bethlehem, and as He came to Jerusalem. Beginning to end the same. One purpose. One mission. To give Himself. To save us from our sins.

And while after all this the world may be the same, or even worse; and your fear and problems and struggles may remain; while all that may be the same, one thing has changed: you have been changed. For your King, your Saviour, has come not just to the world, but to you. Jesus doesn't save worlds or cities or peoples – He saves individuals. He saves you. For as He enters Jerusalem to die, so He enters our hearts that we might die – die to sin, and rise to a new life in Him. And so He sheds His blood. For you. Your blood can't do it, for His Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, your blood would have been required, to make this world a better place. But His Kingdom is not of this world, and so He sheds His blood. Good Friday. Black Friday. He sheds His blood to wash away your sin. He sheds His blood, that by eating His body and drinking His blood, He might come to you and live in you. His gentle power changing you, forgiving you, saving you.

And so our cries of Hosanna have come true. Our Lord has saved. And He continues to save, for the time of His gentle power has not yet ended. It will one day end, as we heard, ***“Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”*** Now it is the time of grace. But the time of His coming in glory and power and majesty is coming. As surely as His first coming in gentleness, so certain is His second coming in glory. And so we begin our Advent preparations, looking back and looking forward. Looking at our Saviour who comes to us, and is coming again. And so we join the crowds and cry, ***“Hosanna! Lord, save! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”*** And

because He comes, blessed are we. Blessed. Saved. Forgiven.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.