

30 November 2008
Advent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Your King is Coming”

Text: Mark 11:1-10 (Isaiah 64:1-9; 1 Cor 1:3-9)

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

Commenting on the current economic downturn, writer Judith Levine wrote this in last Sunday's Washington Post:

Adversity will not make us nicer, more spiritual beings. We are not about to join hands around the globe and start singing “O Come All Ye Faithful” as we watch the Dow plummet. In fact, people are more likely to fight, drink to excess or mug their neighbors when money is tight.

And for many people that is true for one simple reason: because this economic downturn is taking their gods away from them. Their gods of gold, wood, and stone. Their gods of financial success and security. Their gods that give them self-esteem and a purpose for living. And the specter of celebrating the coming holidays without their gods - or with less of their gods - is a depressing one.

But today, we heard quite a different message - not that our gods are being *taken* away from us, but **“Behold, your King is coming to you, righteous and having salvation.”** Our King, the King of the universe, the King of creation, is coming. And so with apologies to Ms. Levine, Christians all around the world today are joining hearts together in singing “Savior of the Nations, Come”, and *will* join hands around the globe in just a few weeks and sing “O Come All Ye Faithful.” And we will whether the Dow plummets or rockets, whether this year was a happy one or a sad one, whether we are young or old, no matter who was elected president, and no matter what we feel about the future. Because our God and King is not any of these things, but greater than these. And He is coming to us with His gifts of righteousness and salvation.

Now, lest we get smug and thank God “we’re not like them” (Luke 18:11), remember that the reason our King is coming to us is exactly because we *are* like them. He is bringing His gift of righteousness because we are not righteous, and He is bringing His gift of salvation because we need saving. Our false gods may be different, but no less false. As the prophet Isaiah told us today, **“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.”** And

indeed, how true. When we do good and right, how often do we pollute it by pride? When we become offended is it not because of our overblown sense of self-importance? Is not the one we love and serve the most the one with the same name as you and me? And seating ourselves on our thrones, we expect others to do the same, and treat us accordingly. And with houses and churches and communities so full of us little kings and queens, no wonder we get into turf wars with each other . . . and, as Ms. Levine said, *fight, drink to excess, and mug our neighbors.*

But today the call goes out: ***“Behold, your King is coming to you,”*** - which would be bad news for us throne-snatchers, were it not for the next phrase: He is coming ***“righteous and having salvation.”*** That makes it good news. Our King is coming to serve us. He did not demand His throne (as we do), but left it to come to us in humility, riding on a donkey’s colt. He came to ascend the cross for us, to forgive us prideful, self-important, self-serving sinners, to make us right again, and to give us His salvation. This King came to us at Christmas, and was named Jesus.

And how do you meet such a King? **We repent.** We repent of making ourselves our own little kings and queens, and fix our eyes on the true King. We repent of the sins we use to serve us and please us and keep us in power, that our King take them away. We repent and not be upset that our gods are being taken away from us, but rejoice that our true God and King is coming to us, to take us as His own.

And that is why you’re here today, for here Your King is coming to you today, coming as your Saviour, coming with His forgiveness. ***“Behold, your King is coming to you, righteous and having salvation”*** is true not only of His coming at Bethlehem, but still today - where in the waters of Holy Baptism Jesus comes and washes us clean of our sins; where with the words of Holy Absolution Jesus comes and pronounces us righteous; and where in the bread and wine of Holy Communion Jesus comes and feeds us with the bread of life and the righteousness and salvation He brings for us. And so the ***“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”*** that the crowds cried out to Jesus as He entered Jerusalem humble and riding on a colt, we now cry out to Him here as Jesus enters this place in these humble means, rejoicing that our King is coming *to us*. To be our true and rightful God. Our God who comes to save us.

And while, as Ms. Levine wrote, *adversity will not make us nicer, more spiritual beings* - our King can. And does. For as Isaiah went on to write, ***“we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.”*** Our King doesn’t come to us to forgive us and leave us, but through His Word and Spirit He is shaping us and changing us; giving us new hearts and new lives; new loves and new loyalties; forming us to be like Christ - that like Him, we too leave our thrones and serve. That as our King provides for us, so too might we provide for others. For with our false gods dethroned and the true God enthroned in our hearts, we *will* be different.

And with eyes of faith focused on Jesus, the eyes of our bodies will be focused on others - not to see what we can get from them, but to see what we can do *for* them. "More spiritual beings" through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

And "more spiritual beings" is what St. Paul was talking about in the Epistle we heard this morning, from his letter to the Corinthian Christians. Words that are kind of surprising, given that the Corinthian churches were some of the most messy and confused that St. Paul had to deal with! But he talks about them in glowing terms - which is, of course, not because of them, but because of the work of Jesus in them. The work of His forgiveness. The work of His Spirit. Paul looks at them with the eyes of faith, and so is confident of Jesus' work in them. Did the Corinthians still have a long way to go? Certainly! But so do we. But we can be confident in Jesus' work in us as well - His forgiving and transforming work - so that Paul's words to the Corinthians are true for us as well: ***"that in Jesus, in every way we are enriched . . . we are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as we wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain us to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."***

How important those words! That we put our faith not in ourselves or our own spiritual progress, but in Jesus and His work in us; in the gifts He gives to us; and that it is He who will sustain us to the end, guiltless in His forgiveness. For even as we look *back* to the coming of our King at Christmas, and look for His coming *now* in His Word and Sacraments, so too we are looking *forward* to His coming again at the end - ***when He rends the heavens and comes down to judge the living and the dead***. And when He does, we will sing to Him then as we will today, and as we have all along: ***Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*** For we are not afraid of the judgment, but know the words that will be spoken to us - the same words that our Saviour has spoken to us here, as He sustained us with His forgiveness and kept us strong in His love. His *"I forgive you all your sins"* will be just as true for us then as it is for us now.

And when our King comes to us in the end, guess what? We will be enthroned - kings and queens not of our own making, but of His making. And not just for a time, but for eternity. For when He comes again one final time, our King will seat us on His throne, in His kingdom, where we will reign with Him forever.

And that, my friends, is why we rejoice. Whether the Dow plummets or rockets, whether this year was a happy one or a sad one, whether we are young or old, no matter who was elected president, and no matter what we feel about the future. Our King who came for us, and is coming for us, will come again for us. Rejoice and repent and prepare to meet Him.

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.