

27 November 2016
Advent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Leading the Way”

Text: Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 21:1-11; Isaiah 2:1-5

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

Blue paraments. *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (LSB #357). The wreath. It's Advent. The start of a new church year. The church doesn't wait for the calendar to turn from one year to the next. She takes the lead, she doesn't follow. To lead the world in a new direction, to a new place. To lead us in a new direction, to a new place. Because the truth is, far too often this year we have followed, not lead. We followed the world's thinking, the world's desire, the world's agenda, the world's words.

The world said: You should want this! And we said: Yes, we want that.
The world said: You should do this! And we said: Yes, we will do that.
The world said: You should be this! And we said: Yes, we will be that.

We want to be at peace with the world. But that peace comes at a high price. It will cost you your life. Your life with Christ.

For a sinful and sin-filled world and a holy church should not be at peace. The church is here to call the world, to call people, to call you and me, to something more. To follow Christ. To desire *His* peace. And that's what the season of Advent is all about.

For the purpose of this season is to make you discontent with your life as it is now. To call you to repent of being satisfied with the status quo, of how things have been this past year, and the direction you've been going, and stir up in you a hunger and thirst for something more, for change - a change inside of you. For by the Holy Spirit's power there is so much more and better - to dream for, hope for, reach for.

And so we heard from St. Paul:

Now is the time to *wake up from our spiritual slumber*.

Now is the time to ***cast off the works of darkness***.

Now is the time to ***put on the Lord Jesus Christ***.

Because our ***salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed***.

Or in other words, it is time to stop your spiritual sleepwalking through life. The dullness, the grogginess, the haze, that makes our life of faith so much less than it could be. Than it

should be.

And those works of darkness? You know what they are. Those things in your life - those thoughts, desires, words, and deeds you want no one else to know; that you never want exposed to the light of day.

And put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't look like the world and the way *it* is - put on His love, His forgiveness, His mercy, His life. Don't follow the world into sin and death, but follow Christ to holiness and life. ***Put on the Lord Jesus Christ***, Paul says, ***and make no provision for the flesh***, - for the world - ***to gratify its desires***. Its desire that we be like it and follow them.

The prophet Isaiah said something similar and put it this way: ***O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Beat your swords into plowshares and your spears into pruning hooks.***

His words there sound like being at peace with the world, but no - it is rather to fight a different fight with a different weapon. To fight not with the weapons of war, with swords and spears, but with the weapon of the Word of God. To **plow up** the weeds of sin that have grown in our hearts and **prune** the wild growth that has spread its branches in our lives. That new growth come. New life. New possibilities. Better. That we not be content, but discontent. That we look to Christ for more.

Which is what the people of Jerusalem were doing when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. They were not content. They were looking for more. They hailed Him as the king that had come to set them free. For they thought that freedom from Roman rule would be nice. But Jesus was thinking that freedom from their sins would be even better.

For that was *Jesus'* discontent. If you are discontent with your life, Jesus is even more. He is not content with the reign of sin in us. He is not content with the death that robs us of life. He is not content with the hurt and pain we cause one another. He is not content with our selfish devouring one another. He is not content when we put the things of this world before Him and follow them rather than Him. And He will not make peace with those things.

So He rode into Jerusalem to do something about it. He didn't just sit in heaven and demand we change. He came to do it.

And so the crowds that day were quite right. He was the ***blessed*** one who had ***come in the name of the Lord***. He was ***the Son of David***. And He had come to ***Hosanna*** them - to ***save them now***. And so by the end of that very week, the one they welcomed with palm branches would be as dead as the palm branches they had cut from the trees. But not in defeat, but victory. For by His death came the blessing of the blessed one. His death paid

the ransom that set all people free. That set you and I free. And from a tyrant far bigger and stronger than Rome - from the tyranny of satan and the bonds of sin and death. And to set us free from just trying to make the best of this life to looking forward to a life that has no end.

And so the blessed one wore a crown not of gold **but a better one** - *of thorns*. The Son of David took His place not on a throne of gold and jewels, **but a better one** - on the throne *of the cross*. And His royal decree was not that we might have the things of this world, **but better** - *Father, forgive them* (Luke 23:34). And He has. And so the shouts of the crowd and our prayer today is fulfilled. Jesus has *Hosanned* us.

And He still is. His work in us goes on. In this world and life we are always arriving but never arrived. For how often *still* do we find ourselves discontent with Him and following after the world instead of discontent with our life and following after Him? So **repent**, He says. Turn around. Come back to the font, come back to the altar, come back to the Word. That the Holy Spirit work in you that holiness the once-dead-but-now-resurrected Christ has for you. That there be more and better for you. That there be forgiveness and life in you. That you hunger and thirst for the life Jesus has come to give to you. That you be satisfied and content. In Him.

So today the call goes out **not just** to move full steam toward Christmas, as the world is doing right now, as an *end-of-year*, blow out, celebration, **but to celebrate Christmas as a beginning-of-year celebration**. Not as the end of 2016, but as the beginning of more, of better. To look *through* Christmas, and to how the God who came as the babe of Bethlehem comes to us now, here. That the same Body and Blood that was laid in a manger and held in Mary's arms, is now on this altar and laid into your mouths. That your life be changed; your hunger and thirst for more fulfilled.

And then this too - that the God who came as the babe of Bethlehem is coming back again. For you. This time not in humility, but in glory. Not in bread and wine, but on clouds. Not on a donkey, but with His angels. And as both Bridegroom and Judge.

To think in that way is to lead and not follow. It is to lead in a new direction, to a new place. Not to bemoan how the world celebrates Christmas, for if anything, we should celebrate even more! But to show the world there's more, there's better. That's Jesus' birth means a new birth for us. That's Jesus' life means a new life for us. And that Jesus' death and resurrection means a resurrection for us after we too die. And so Christmas *really is* not just an end, but a beginning.

And then maybe, just maybe, we can tell the world:

You can have this. And the world say: Yes, we want to have that.

You can do this. And the world say: Yes, we want to do that.

You can be this. And the world say: Yes, we want to be that.

And if we are asked, like Jerusalem asked that day, ***Who is this?*** We can tell them: This is the Saviour, Jesus. Who has come, is coming, and will come again. For you.

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.

[Thanks to Rev. William Weedon for the direction and some of the thoughts in this sermon.]