**Matthew 21:1-11 November 27, 2022**

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

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Matthew chapter 21 here re-reading these words. “Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”

This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

So this is Christmas….well in this case, Advent, but the tradition usually goes that following Thanksgiving we begin the Christmas season. Out there in the world, everywhere you go, it’s Christmas time. The most wonderful time of the year is upon us again. Advent is a time of preparation in the Church for Christmas, but everywhere else it is Christmas time. Which is in itself a time of preparation. Now is the time of preparation for the Christmas celebrations that will come in about a month. When family and friends will come to your house, expecting to have received a Christmas card earlier in the month. Expecting to see all of your regular Christmas decorations, and your tree, with presents wrapped underneath and hopefully one or two for them. They will come also expecting to receive all the regular Christmas treats, the cookies, the breads, and the other special snacks and desserts that are made at this time of year. Now is the time of preparation, and so we set out doing the same things we do every year. We get out the same decorations we put up every year. We put the lights up in the same way. We get out the same ornaments to put up even perhaps on the same artificial tree. Preparing for Christmas is a usual routine, we go about it in the same way that our parents did, and their parents, and so on. We do things the same way, bake the same treats with the same recipes. Tradition is a huge part of the joy of Christmas, knowing that you’re using the same tree skirt that your great grandma did, or singing the same songs, watching the same movies, doing the same things. We prepare the same way they did.

Is Advent the same way? We sing the same songs…we have similar services, we put out the same colors and the same wreath, and light the same candles. But is Advent in itself different from the way the world prepares? It’s not Christmas here, not yet. As a matter of fact in our preparation we have put away a hymn of praise to contemplate our own unworthiness before God. There is a greater celebration to come that we are being prepared for, which means added opportunities for worship and gathering together as brothers and sisters in Christ. In the season of Advent we have a gathering every few days in God’s house to hear about the coming King of Kings . We have multiple meals on Wednesdays. We do things differently. Advent is a series of services to prepare our hearts for Jesus to come not just on one day and be forgotten, but all throughout our lives and finally on the last day to take us to be with him. Advent is building up to Christ’s birth and what it means for our salvation, not just what we will receive in presents wrapped under a tree. Advent is doing things differently than the world does them, it’s counter culture to our society, it’s not just going along with what everyone else is doing, but being prepared by God in a different way.

The same, and different, that’s what this season is, and in the same way it’s what we find in our Gospel lesson. The people do things the same way that everyone else did when a king was coming. But Jesus was a different kind of king. The same doesn’t really make sense when Jesus was so different, but they didn’t know what else to do. What sort of king arrives in such humility? Adorned in no jewels, no gold, no armor. Comes with lowly subjects of common men, not soldiers or men of great influence and power. Jesus rides in on a donkey and a colt as Matthew records in our Gospel lesson, with nothing but cloaks to sit on. He is the fulfillment of a prophecy of a different kind of king. “Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.” Jesus is different, and he changes the people he comes in contact with, Jesus is change, but the people just do the same.

They lay down palm branches and their cloaks, they hail him as the “Son of David!” One who comes in the lineage of the greatest earthly King of Israel who they hope will restore Israel to greatness. They see Jesus on a donkey, they have heard His teachings throughout his ministry, they see how he is dressed and who he is with, but they do the same things that they would do if he did ride in on a warhorse, with a sword gleaming in the sun, with an army to conquer Jerusalem. They didn’t know what to do so they did what any one else would do. And that can become our response as well.

Paul writes in Romans chapter 12, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Paul continues in chapter 13 from our Epistle lesson, “The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” Being a Christian is being different, it is a calling to be different, to not just do what everyone else does, but how easily we conform to the manner of behavior and thoughts of those around us. We follow the crowd, we do not stand out as different but we blend in and do as every one else does. I myself am guilty of turning on Christmas music when I’m relaxing with the kids or doing something around the house. I just turn on whatever generic “holiday” playlist I can find, the first one I’ll find on my phone. And as I sit and listen to these catchy songs about Frosty, and Rudolph, and Santa, the snow, or the cold, or the time of year….my ears always perk up when I hear a Christmas hymn. To hear a pop singer sing “Silent Night” or “O Come All Ye Faithful.” To hear a classic singer like Nat King Cole or Bing Crosby sing a timeless Christmas hymn that specifically talks about God, Mary, and Jesus. It means more, it’s significant, it’s special, it speaks to my faith, it strengthens my faith to hear those words in comparison to the shallow, superficial popular songs. If those songs are cotton candy: airy, sugary, no substance, a solid Christmas hymn is like steak for the soul. It’s distinct, and different. It matters.

My friends in Christ we are called to be the same in our lives. Distinct. Different. To be more than just a leaf in a rushing stream that is carried along on it’s way, doing the same things everyone else does despite the fact that something is different. But we fail so often in standing up for our faith, for speaking out about the truth, for being a witness of Christ. Especially during Advent, and these weeks ahead. We just go along and do what the world does. Giving in to the dark side of Christmas, the side that talks only about what we want to get and want to do, rather than being prepared for what God has called us to do. To be different, to worry more about the preparation of your heart for Christ’s return than your house for your family’s visit. This is a special time of year, but we are to prepare for it different than others. Perhaps it means waiting to put up your Christmas tree. Perhaps it means taking on the challenge of doing a regular Advent devotion, coming to worship on Sunday and Wednesday, focusing on proper means of returning thanks to God rather than just giving more gifts to yourself or other loved ones. Making it less about stuff and more about substance, about what really matters, about the King who rides in humility not to conquer, but to die.

The crowds thought he’d be like any other king, even though he looked different and spoke of a kingdom that was not of this world. And Jesus was a different kind of king, a king who came to bring lasting peace rather than just a short occupation. Jesus was a king who came to die for his subjects, a king who sacrificed himself so that even his enemies would not die eternally. He was different, and thanks be to God he’s different, because a status quo, traditional king of that time wouldn’t care at all for his subjects, and would sacrifice them for his own life. But we serve a king who died in our place to save us from our sin. We serve a humble king, who was different and did things differently so that we would not suffer for all eternity as we so rightfully deserve. Your life comes from the work of a King who rode in on a donkey and a colt, who is instantly seen as different, so you can be different from those around you, and you can be His witness all throughout the world. God bless you this Advent season and in the preparation of your hearts.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.