

# Mixed Metaphors

Mark 11:1-10

Today is a day for mixed metaphors. Happy New Year!! It is the new Church Year. Advent is upon us, so we get to begin retelling the account of God's interaction with His people as He prepared the world to receive the Savior. So, of course, our Gospel lesson is the story of Palm Sunday. All of this really does fit together. You might say, this time of year has the theme: "He came. He comes. He is coming."

The new Church Year begins with the preparation for the coming of Christ the first time, as the child of Mary and Joseph – He came. And we conclude the Church Year, with the focus on Christ's return at the end of time – He is coming.

The Old Testament is where the Advent season begins. Yes, in the coming weeks we will be discussing persons like John the Baptist and Simeon and Mary and Joseph. But the time of preparation, represented in the season of Advent, began almost in the beginning. After Adam and Eve's fall into sin, God immediately promises to send the Christ into the world, as is recorded in Genesis chapter three. The same promise is made to Abraham many years later.

Isaiah, the prophet who lived more than 700 years before Jesus was born, spends good portions of his book prophesying of Christ's coming. And in our Old Testament lesson, Isaiah speaks on behalf of the people with a prayer in the form of a psalm. The persistence with which Isaiah pleads on behalf of the people of Israel is so daring that he complains that God has taken the people's perverse, sinful resistance to His mercy as an opportunity to harden their hearts as He did Pharaoh's in Egypt.

Isaiah is probably right, but that does not make what God did wrong. It was not God's fault that Pharaoh was a sinful, selfish, unbeliever. He was born a blind, dead, enemy of God, and the Lord used the evil in Pharaoh's heart so that all the world would know that it was God and God alone who rescued His people Israel from the bondage of slavery.

In Isaiah's day, the people of Israel had sold themselves back into the slavery of sin. They certainly still "worshiped" the Lord in regard to outward acts, but they were limping along with one foot in the church and the other in the open sewer of sin and idolatry.

It's very much like our Western society where God is "worshiped" with one foot in the church (sometimes hardly even a big toe), but the mind and body is elsewhere. In Israel, once again, just like with Pharaoh in Egypt, the Lord allowed those who dared to be His enemy to provide their own punishment and eventually Israel met a disastrous end when the Babylonians came, destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple to the ground and

carried the people off into exile for seventy years.

All this was done so that, once again, it would be known that God and God alone has saved His people. As Isaiah says, and St. Paul later reiterates, “all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” the proverbial “filthy rags” of which Paul speaks...[and Paul elsewhere again quotes Isaiah] we are the clay, you are our potter.” We are nothing without the Lord. As Isaiah also says, “without Him our sin sweeps us away as the wind blows a dry leaf.”

I don't know that I could have mixed in more metaphors or themes into one sermon.

But the reality is that there is but one King and one Redeemer. One Messiah would come and bear the sin of Adam, and Abraham, even Pharaoh, and Isaiah, Paul, Mary and Joseph, and John the Baptist. He would be born of a virgin and they would call him Immanuel -- which means “God with us.”

The coming of Christ is the answer to Isaiah's prayer for God to “rend the heavens and come down.” It took 700 years for the prayer to be answered. By the time Christ came, most people had given up hope for the Son of God to enter the world as Isaiah foretold. But He came.

Like these weeks of Advent, the Old Testament era was a time of preparation for the coming of the Messiah. It was time to get ready. It was time to anticipate and prepare. He is coming. But our preparation and celebration is not just for the nostalgia of the Christ-child coming at Christmas.

He came and for this we celebrate. But there is a reason we sometimes read the Palm Sunday text on the first Sunday of Advent. It is not just a foreshadowing of what that Christ-child would grow up to become – the Messiah entering into Jerusalem to die for our sin.

But we need to hear those words, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” We sing those words each week in the “Sanctus” as we prepare to receive Christ’s body and blood. He comes to us.

This season is not just of misty-eyed nostalgia about nativity scenes and family gatherings and presents under the tree. Yes, He certainly came as the child of Mary in Bethlehem. But blessed is He who comes, and continues to come to His people in body and blood, just as He came into this world with flesh and blood as that child in Bethlehem.

He came; He comes; and He is coming. We continue our preparation for the Lord’s return, which is also a part of the Advent celebration. We pray the prayer of Isaiah that the Lord soon would rend the heavens and come down, and we know that all will be accomplished according to His will and in His time. Until that time we say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Amen.