

2008-09-20 Matthew 21:6-9 Prepare to meet the Lord!

Advent 1 November 29-30, 2009 (Children – The Advent wreath, the prophet's candle)

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ Amen

God's Word is written in Matthew 21:6-9

These are Your Words heavenly Father. May they prepare us to meet the Lord! Your Word is truth! Amen.

Dear Friends, in Christ,

If you heard that Jesus was coming to visit your home in about one week, how would you prepare? Would you clean and dust everything? Would you make special food and put it in the best serving dishes to welcome Him? Would you set aside your best clothes to wear for the occasion when He enters? Would you set the Bible out in a conspicuous place or would you take time to read it so Jesus would get the idea how faithful you were to Him as your Lord?

Let's change the scene. You go to your doctor, who is a Christian. He tells you that all the medical tests you have taken have come back and there is serious trouble. He gives you about one week to live or as he says it, you have one week before you are going to meet the Lord for the last time on earth. If that was the case, who cares about cleaning, baking, and what kind of clothes you will wear! You want to be ready to meet Jesus for eternity. Are you ready? How can you be sure? We'll answer those questions with our theme:

Prepare to meet the Lord!

First, what can we do to prepare? Of the crowd who welcomed Jesus on his ride, few were prepared to truly meet Him. Jesus was coming to Jerusalem to celebrate one last Passover with his disciples before His death. Over a three year period Jesus had gone to Jerusalem many times. The crowds of people were anticipating that Jesus might be the promised Deliverer. They were ready to follow His lead if He would only use His power to create signs and wonders against the Roman Empire as Moses had done against Pharaoh in Egypt. But, time after time, Jesus disappointed them by avoiding the crowds and their call for Him to be their king.

Finally, this Passover seemed different. Jesus was entering Jerusalem on a donkey as other kings had done, just as it had been prophesied in the Bible. More than that, news had spread quickly among the pilgrims near the city about Jesus' miracles and especially of *raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 12:17-18)*. Although the crowd had no costly gifts, they honored Jesus by throwing down their outer coats and breaking off palm branches to lay before Him in honor as He rode. They also called out: *"Hosanna to the Son of David!" (A term meaning: save us Messiah-King) "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!" (v.9)*

The crowd thought that they were ready to meet the Lord and to properly welcome Him. Although most riders would have been flattered by such a welcome, it was far too small for Jesus. The crowd had not cleaned their hearts in preparing to meet Him. They had not been prepared by faith to receive all that He was or all that He had to give. They had not stocked up on the food of His Word to see that as sinners their greatest need was forgiveness that only Jesus could offer. They attempted to avoid the reality that they were going to die and face God's judgment. How close they were to the One who had the saving truth so they could touch Him, but how far from Him they were at the same time!

Can we get caught up in such material thoughts? We can. Just because we've learned how powerful Christ is doesn't always mean we know what to ask for or what His will is. If He doesn't answer our requests, has Jesus lost His strength? Has He lost His love for us? No! Jesus knows what we need more than we do. That is why He entered Jerusalem in His way and His time. As Jesus entered the city, it was He who had less than a week to live. He knew precisely what He needed to do, because His heavenly Father had plotted out His course for Him. As Jesus neared Jerusalem, He knew where the donkey was and what it would take for the owner to allow Him to use it for His ride into the city. Jesus even welcomed the praise and honor of the people, even though it was short-sighted. It all set into set motion God's plan for Him to save us from our sins.

Second, it's the Lord who prepares us to meet Him. No amount of praise from the people would change Jesus' humble resolve. He obeyed His Father even though it led through the streets of Jerusalem to the cross, death, and the grave. By hanging on the cross Jesus took away the power sin over people. By dying He turned death into life. By lying in the grave, he sanctified the graves of all believers to assure them that the grave will not be their permanent home. Our risen Lord will appear again and at His powerful Word all the dead will rise. And those who believe in Him will be changed and given glorious bodies. Jesus will make all believers holy so they will be fully prepared to meet Him.

Another way of describing Jesus' victory is that He will conquer the devil and all who are evil. What we must be sure of is that we will not end up as His enemies who will be sent away forever. Remember Jesus' parable about a king who invited people to a wedding reception. As he met the guests, he saw a man without wedding clothes. He had the man thrown out into darkness where there was crying forever. Why was he so angry? Along with his invitation, the king had sent clothes for the guests. If the man had no special clothes it was his own fault for rejecting them.

Today, through His Word and sacraments God offers the perfect clothes, He offers Christ's completed work which gives eternal life. The fact that we are here today in worship is a good sign that we are not rejecting His means of saving us. God wants to keep our faith alive by His Word in two ways. One, He is constantly showing us our need for Jesus. The problem with many of the Jews at Jesus' time who rejected Him was that they did not look fully into God's law to see their sinfulness. The same temptation has happened to Christians. In the book of Revelation, 2 and 3, God showed John the problems of Christians in several churches. In one church the people had lost their love. They honored God but He was not first in their lives. The love of Christ was no longer important to them. God warned that they would not be prepared to meet the Lord if they didn't have His love. Other believers were compromising their faith with false teaching or sinful living; as if faith gave them a license to sin or to believe anything they wanted. These people were losing sight of the saving truth. In each situation, Jesus called them to repent and return to Him before they lost their salvation completely. We'll be examining more about true repentance in next week's sermon.

God also gave His Word to assure us of His love in Christ. We admit that we are too often sinful. We are not always ready to meet the Lord. If we were told by a doctor that we had a week to live, many of us would panic because we are so tied to this world. Many times we are no different than the crowd who welcomed Jesus with empty hosannas. Thankfully, their sinfulness didn't stop Jesus from riding into Jerusalem and it won't stop Him from seeking and saving us. He promised, "*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*" (*Revelation 2:10*)

Jesus still comes "*in the name of the Lord*", just as the crowd said. In other words, He comes to reveal the truths of God that will save us and keep us on course to eternal life. Jesus knows how big our temptations, sins and troubles can be. But as our Lord, He is greater! As we trust in His unfailing love and call out to Him, "Hosanna," which means "Save us", He will answer our prayers. He will protect us from our enemies, even from death and the devil. As we live in Christ's love, grace, and forgiveness, our whole life of faith will be a longing to meet our Lord. Someday at His choosing we will be happy to see Him, and to our joy, our Lord will be just as happy to meet us forever. Amen.