

Jeremiah 33:14–16

14 “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. **15** “In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. **16** In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.’

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? **10** Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. **12** May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. **13** May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Luke 19:28–40

28 After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. **29** As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, **30** “Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. **31** If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it.’ ”

32 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. **33** As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

34 They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. **36** As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

37 When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

38 “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

40 "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

Grassroots

In our corrupt day and age when things go wrong, we often hear about returning to our grassroots. I like this term. "Going back to grassroots," as in we're backtracking to our beginnings, going back to our founding principles and reasons that got us going in the first place, before the bricks and mortar and bylaws and board of directors. What I find so interesting in all this is the fact that you never hear this term used when things are going well. You only ever hear this call made when things are tanking. That makes me wonder: Do the reasons and principles for our beginnings no longer matter, except when times are tough?

Our Gospel lesson for this morning is the Palm Sunday account of Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem. That's not a misprint. This is the appointed lesson for the first Sunday in Advent, and it has been for centuries. Why do we start off the new church year and the Christmas season with an Easter-time lesson? Well...why was Jesus processing down the road into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday? The sole purpose was to be crucified for the sins of the entire world that coming Friday and rising victorious from the dead the following Sunday. OK, but what does all this have to do with Advent?"

Advent is not simply a "warm-up act" for Christmas! The blue paraments, the Christmas decorations, the hymnody, tell us that Christmas is right around the corner. All our senses let us know no matter where we're at, that Christmas is only a couple of short weeks away. It's time to get ready. This being the case, our Christian senses tend to get oriented towards the manger and the nativity, and there's nothing wrong with that! I would certainly hope that the sight of an Advent wreath or a Christmas tree or the sounds of a Christmas carol do cause you to think about baby Jesus first, and not the shopping list in your pocket. However, there's so much more to this season than just the joy of baby Jesus on Christmas Eve.

The word "Advent" simply means "coming." During this season, we take the time to go back to the grassroots of our faith, to refocus and reorient ourselves to God's interaction with us and the nativity of our Lord certainly is an important part of this divine and compassionate interaction. The womb of Mary and the Bethlehem manger are the starting points for Jesus Christ's long, purposeful march to Calvary for our salvation. But these are the starting points of our salvation history. All too often mankind's salvation is treated as two separate historical narratives. A baby named Jesus was born at Christmas time and that means joy and peace on earth. Coincidentally, we also celebrate a thirty-three-year-old man named Jesus who suffered, died, and was resurrected at Easter time, which means peace in heaven and forgiveness for all mankind. Sadly, many people never make the connection between the two accounts. They never bother to consider or reflect on the reason that Jesus came to this fallen and sinful world.

Jesus conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary in a humble little stable because of our sin; because of our complete inability to bring about our own salvation in any way, shape, or form! This is precisely what makes Advent a penitential season no different than Lent. It's not a warm-up act for Christmas. It's a time we purposefully set aside as a way of assisting us in going back to the grassroots of our salvation, forgiveness, and eternal life. Our Advent grassroots campaign takes us from the manger back to the cross. Maybe that doesn't make sense. Logically and chronologically, everyone knows that the baby, Jesus, has to come before the crucified man, Jesus, right? However, theologically, in faith we do recognize and understand that the little babe was conceived and born for one reason and one reason alone, to lay down His life on a cross as an all-redeeming sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. This is precisely why the Palm Sunday account has been the traditional Gospel lesson for the first Sunday in Advent for centuries. This grassroots account serves to take us back to the real reason for the season. The manger only makes sense when understood through the lens of the cross.

I would also like to point out that our salvation history doesn't end with Christ's "past-tense Adventing" among us so many centuries ago. God's saving action isn't just restricted to a story over two thousand years ago. There is also a very present Advent reality that we often fail to recognize in faith. Jesus still comes to us mightily and powerfully in His life-saving Word and Sacraments. Many people fail to recognize this blessed reality. People actually reject and condemn God's means of grace and salvation simply because they can't physically behold Jesus in His means of grace. We need to repent for our overlooking or disregarding of this wonderful present day "Adventing," of our Lord and Savior because we might be looking for something different; something bigger or better. He continues to come to us in Word and Sacrament because we still sin in the present. We still presently need His forgiveness. Contrary to what you may think when you look in the mirror, things are bad; sinfully bad. The foundations and principles that our Lord originally founded in His creation so long ago have gone away. Things have been bad since the Garden fall, and things have only gotten worse. The call to return to the grassroots of our salvation is needed now more than ever.

Finally, let us not forget about the future Advent of our Lord; the final coming of Jesus Christ in judgment; something which we just spent the last couple of weeks discussing. Again, stay awake and vigilant in your faith; fear, love, and truly trust in God above all things? Our thoughts, words, and deeds betray us! The Advent grassroots call us to faithful repentance.

Our Lord continually "advented" with us since the dawn of time. because of our sin; because of our complete inability to bring about our own salvation in any way, shape, or form! Our loving and gracious God has always been here in our midst, working and bringing about the absolutely free gifts of life, salvation, and forgiveness for us. He is not far away and distant from us. We don't have to undertake great spiritual treks so as to find and discover a hidden, secret, faraway

Jesus. Simply turn around, repent, go back to the grassroots of your salvation. You will find your Lord and Savior right there, holding out His pierced hands to you in love.

I pray our Lord will bless you in the days to come as we faithfully return to the grassroots of our salvation, turning and returning in true Christian repentance and joy to the fount and source of our complete forgiveness and eternal salvation—our past, present, and future advent king and savior, Jesus Christ.

AMEN