

“The King Comes as a Servant”

December 23rd – tomorrow is Christmas Eve! Christmas is coming! It’s just around the corner! How exciting or, is it? Some of you are probably full of anticipation – you just can’t wait for all that will unfold in the next couple of days – and some of you might be full of apprehension, to be honest.

The Christmas Season has so much that goes along with it. Getting ready – getting everything prepared – from buying and wrapping presents, to cooking and cleaning. Some of you sitting here tonight might be a bit distracted, just thinking about everything you still have to do to get ready.

We get so wrapped up in getting ready to have fun and celebrate and rejoice – that somehow, the fun, the celebrating and rejoicing – escape us.

Then there’s that annual longing for Christmases past – wishing we could recreate Christmas like the ones we used to know. But it’s never the same. We should learn from past attempts, but we don’t. Deep down we know that we are chasing a dream – and the dream is always better than the reality.

Christians are not so much nostalgic people, as we are pilgrim people. We are constantly moving forward – making our way through the wilderness of this world to the promised land of heaven. And yet, even as we journey – we already have a share in that kingdom which is yet to come. By faith, we belong to that fellowship of all believers – which includes Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – Peter, James and John – and all the rest.

So here we stand – on the verge of another Christmas – IN the world, but not OF the world. And the Advent message goes out once again – the King is coming!

That’s what makes life worth living. All the rest – the celebrations with family, the moments of happiness and contentment we find along the way – all of that is just the tinsel and the glitter. The real treasure is the King who comes among us with His grace – the King who comes to us with His gifts – the King who comes to be our Servant.

We can speak of Christ's kingdom of power and His kingdom of glory – but if it were not for His grace – His power and glory would be more of a threat than a comfort. If it were not for the servanthood of Jesus – we would not rightly know God – and we would journey through this life and this world as those who have no hope.

The Prophet Malachi wrote: “But who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap” (3:2). We all stand accused before the judgment seat of God. Before Him, there is no plea bargaining, no playing with the evidence, no weaseling out from under the prescribed penalty of the Law – for God the Judge says – “the soul that sins shall die.”

But before this King comes in judgment, He has already come as a servant. He went about doing good, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, lifting up the lowly, fulfilling the whole law of God for us and for our sakes.

There were no false airs about Jesus – no putting on a show – no trying to impress people like we do. Foolishly we try to build ourselves up, by tearing others down. We want others to know how powerful and important and special we are. Not so with Jesus.

He went around the table in that upper room with a towel and a washbasin – washing the disgustingly dirty feet of His disciples – doing the job of the lowest of servants. To these who would betray Him, deny Him, and abandon Him – He says – “Do you understand what I have done for you? ... Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.”

This washing of the feet was a necessity – and a part of the hospitality of the day – but it pales in comparison to the depths to which Jesus would sink to serve such sinners like us!

What a King we have – who would lay aside His royal majesty and come among us as a servant. He loves us by sacrificing Himself, giving up His life, to provide what we so desperately need. Greater love has no man than this, that he should lay down his life for another. Such is the depth of Christ's love for you – that He freely and gladly gives up His life – so that you may live.

Jesus does what no king in this world would ever do – lower Himself to be a servant, even to the point of death upon a cross. He embraces our sin, becoming the victim of our guilt. He sheds His blood to redeem us – to buy us back – snatching us from the dominion of the devil, rescuing us from the kingdom of darkness, and ushering us into the light of His kingdom

The Scripture says: “Once you were darkness, but now you are children of the light!” So then, live as children of the light – as citizens of a heavenly kingdom. No more backstabbing and petty jealousy – no more tearing down and chewing up your neighbor’s reputation – no more pushing your own agenda, and lording it over other people.

That may be the way the world operates, but it’s not the way we are to operate. Among us, the greatest isn’t the guy on the top, but the one on the bottom – the one who lowers Himself, humbles Himself to take up the painstaking and filthy task of being the Servant of all – giving it all, His blood, His breath, His life – for sinners like us.

It’s no wonder that kings shall shut their mouths because of Him. Such love leaves the world dumbstruck in amazement. Who could ever guess that the King of the entire universe would be so merciful. Who would ever dream that He would sprinkle many nations with His blood, purifying for Himself a people who are redeemed and made holy – to walk before Him in righteousness and purity all the days of their lives.

But such is your King, this night, and always. Such is the gift given to you by the Christ, your Servant – who comes to you meek and lowly, wrapped in the swaddling clothes of His Word.

No matter what your circumstances are this night – whether anticipation or apprehension – whether joy or pain, gladness or sorrow – this King is your Servant. He bandages up all your wounds – purges away your sin – and sets you free to be a child of God --- so that you too may love and be of service to those around you.

The world that surrounds us is dying for Christ’s love – for our service. We love, because God first loved us. Or, to say it a bit differently – we serve, because Christ first served us.

As Advent turns to Christmas – may all rejoice to hear and receive Him who comes to us righteous and having salvation. May you, your family, and your neighbor – rejoice to live in, and live from the life-giving service of God’s very own Son, Jesus Christ – in whom you have life, life everlasting. Amen.