

12.18.2022 Advent 4 (Philippians 4:4-7; John 1:19-28)

Our sermon this morning begins with a poem by Edwin Markham, titled  
*"How the Great Guest Came."*

Before the cathedral in grandeur rose At Ingelburg where the Danube goes;  
Before its forest of silver spire Went airily up to the clouds and fires;  
Before the oak had ready a beam, While yet the arch was stone and dream  
-- There where the altar was later laid, Conrad the cobbler, plied his trade.  
It happened one day at the year's white end -- Two neighbors called in on  
their old-time friend; And they found the shop, so meager and mean,  
Made gay with a hundred boughs of green. Conrad was stitching with face  
ashine, But suddenly stopped as he twitched a twine: "Old friends, good  
news! At dawn today, As the cocks were scaring the night away, The  
Lord appeared in a dream to me, And said, 'I am coming your Guest to be!'  
So I've been busy with feet astir, Strewing the floor with branches of fir.  
The wall is washed and the shelf is shined, And over the rafter the holly  
twined. He comes today, and the table is spread With milk and honey and  
wheaten bread."

His friends went home; and his face grew still As he watched for the  
shadow across the sill. He lived all the moments o'er and o'er, When the  
Lord should enter the lowly door -- The knock, the call, the latch pulled up,  
The lighted face, the offered cup. He would wash the feet where the  
spikes had been, He would kiss the hands where the nails went in, And  
then at the last would sit with Him And break the bread as the day grew  
dim.

While the cobbler mused there passed his pane A beggar drenched by the  
driving rain. He called him in from the stony street And gave him shoes  
for his bruised feet. The beggar went and there came a crone, Her face  
with wrinkles of sorrow sown. A bundle of faggots bowed her back, And  
she was spent with the wrench and rack. He gave her his loaf and steadied  
her load As she took her way on the weary road.

Then to his door came a little child, Lost and afraid in the world so wild,  
In the big, dark world. Catching it up, He gave it the milk in the waiting

cup, And led it home to its mother's arms, Out of the reach of the world's alarms.

The day went down in the crimson west And with it the hope of the blessed Guest, And Conrad sighed as the world turned gray: "Why is it, Lord, that your feet delay? Did you forget that this was the day?"

Then soft in the silence a Voice he heard: "Lift up your heart, for I have kept my word. Three times I came to your friendly door; Three times my shadow was on your floor. I was the beggar with the bruised feet; I was the woman you gave to eat; I was the child on the homeless street!"

Advent is a season in which we reflect on, and prepare for, the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord on Christmas Day, as well as a time of expectant waiting and preparation for His Second Coming. Over the course of this season our daily prayer focuses primarily on these two advents. The first occurring when our Savior Christ came to visit us in great humility as a Child in Bethlehem, and the second taking place on the Last Day, when He shall come again in His glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead.

As Christians, we joyfully celebrate our Lord's first advent, and look forward with great anticipation to the second, but in the Collect we prayed today, we recognize a third advent of Christ that falls between His first coming at Christmas and His Second Coming at the end of time. Our prayer this morning began with these words: "O LORD, raise up, we pray thee, thy power, and come among us..." On this final Sunday in Advent, we not only look back in time to the Nativity, and forward to the end of time, but pray that the Lord would come among us at this time. Like Conrad the cobbler, we expect Jesus our Guest to be.

In Markham's poem our Lord came to Conrad as an injured beggar, a hungry woman, and a lost child. This poem suggests that one of the unique ways our Savior Christ comes among us at this time is in the least of these, and that truth is Divinely revealed by God in those familiar words from Matthew 25 in which Jesus said, "*I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me*" (25:35-36). It's often difficult for us to recognize Him, but Christ comes to us today in the least of these, and when we, like Conrad, minister to the sick,

feed the hungry, and help the lost find their way home, we are in fact doing this service to our Lord, for it was He who said, *“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me”* (25:40). Our Advent prayer this morning is that the Lord would “come among us,” and God has answered that prayer, for He comes to us, He dwells with us, in the least of these.

In this season we also recognize the truth that God comes to dwell with us through His written Word. Jesus said, *“Those who love Me will keep My word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them”* (John 14:23 NRSV). The thought expressed here is that God will not only love those who obediently keep His word, but will take such delight in loving them that He will make Himself a home in them. Our bodies are *“the temple of the Holy Spirit”* (1 Corinthians 6:19), and when we “read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” Holy Scripture (Collect for Advent 2), when we keep Christ’s word in our head and in our heart, and strive to proclaim His message in our lives by *“faith expressed through love”* (Galatians 5:6), we continually prepare ourselves to receive Him. Like Conrad the cobbler who so carefully, and so beautifully adorned his home and set his table in order to welcome “the blessed Guest,” we must also, by the grace of God and through obedience to His written Word, at all times and in all places prepare our selves, our souls and bodies, to receive Christ.

In today’s Epistle, St. Paul wrote words that speak of such preparation. He said, *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand”* (Philippians 4:4-5). Paul exhorted Christians: *“Let your moderation be known unto all men.”* The word translated in this verse as *moderation* is found in many New Testament passages, and in those passages is also rendered as: gentleness, graciousness, patience, forbearance, meekness, kindness, and humility. When we consider the different ways that one word is translated, we may conclude that the *moderation* St. Paul calls us to make known unto all men is in fact a Christ-likeness, an attitude of both thought and will that strives with gentleness and graciousness, with kindness and humility, *“not to be served, but to serve”* (Mark 10:45) by daily offering our lives to God and neighbor.

Our Savior Christ comes among us in the least of these, He comes to dwell with us through the comfortable words of Holy Scripture, and in this third

Advent of Christ that falls between His first coming at Christmas and His Second Coming at the end of time, Almighty God comes to commune with His people in a tangible and visible manner through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In the synoptic Gospels and in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (11:17-34), we learn that at the Last Supper, our Lord took bread and wine, and said to the Apostles, "*This is My Body... This is My Blood... Do this in remembrance of Me*" (Luke 22:19-20). The word *remembrance* is a translation of the Greek word *anamnesis*, and if you ever happen to be looking for the perfect example of the true meaning of a word being "lost in translation," here it is.

In our day, we most often define the word *remembrance* as recalling an event in the past that is over and done, but that's not the meaning of the word *anamnesis*. In Greek culture, *anamnesis* was a word used to describe the movement of an abstract, or immaterial idea, into the concrete, material world. For example, Plato used the word *anamnesis* to communicate the way a thought moved from the world of ideas, into the physical world. So, *anamnesis* has nothing to do with recalling an event that is over and done, but rather, describes the process of something from another world becoming fully present in this world.

When Jesus said to the Apostles, "*Do this in remembrance of Me,*" He was not instructing them to passively recall, or to symbolically memorialize, an event that is over and done. Instead, at the Last Supper, He was ordaining these men as priests in His Church, and commanding them, by His grace, to make Him, His Body and His Blood, sacramentally present to the people of God. The Church proclaims "*the Lord's death until He comes*" (1 Corinthians 11:26) by doing *this* in remembrance of Him, by making a glorious heavenly reality fully present in this world. In His Church, through the Sacrament He instituted and commanded us to continue, the Lord comes among us to commune with His people, and thus fulfills His promise, "*I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*" (Matthew 28:20).

Our Savior came to us as a child in Bethlehem, He will come again at the end of time, and He comes among His people today in many and various ways. The poem we opened with this morning illustrates that truth, as well as the fact that we do not rise up to knock on heaven's door, God our Blessed Guest, descends to knock at our door. As we read in Revelation, "*Behold, I stand at*

*the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). May God bless us with grace and strength, that we may strive daily, like Conrad, to prepare in ourselves a home for the Blessed Guest. May we hear Him knock, open the door, and receive Him into our heart by faith, with thanksgiving.*