

Happy New Year! Wait, why do you look confused? It *is* the New Year, after all. Well, not the calendar year, but the Church year. Our congregation observes the church year which means the themes and emphases follow a similar pattern throughout the seasons. Yes, we can all think of Christmas and Easter as examples of holidays in that calendar. However, this church calendar starts with the season of Advent.

Advent is the four Sundays preceding Christmas, and it is a time of preparation for the coming of our Lord on Christmas. Unlike the world around us which has seemingly celebrated Christmas as soon as Halloween was over, Advent is not simply pre-Christmas.

Part of that explains why we have the Gospel reading we have today. It might seem counterintuitive to start with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem days before Jesus would die, then to jump to Jesus' birth come Christmas. However, this reading this church New Year's Day highlights what Jesus is all about *every* day of the year. **JESUS WRINGS OUT THE OLD AND RINGS IN THE NEW THROUGH HIS PRESENCE.**

First, I. Jesus wrings out the old as His presence shakes things up. Jesus is a controversial figure, and He can't help but change those with whom He interacts. To wring out wet rag, you have to twist and shake it, so too, Jesus wrings out the old.

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, He draws a crowd, and they are all proclaiming **"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"** The crowd comes to cheer on Jesus as He goes into Jerusalem.

Our text continues, **"And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, 'Who is this?'"** Jesus' presence always makes a difference. When Jesus was born Matthew also tells us, **"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;"** Literally, Herod was stirred up by the wise men bringing news of a new king. When Jesus died on the cross, there was an earthquake, and when He rose, there was another earthquake.

This shouldn't come as a surprise. Jesus is God, and any encounter with God is going to be an awesome thing. In the book of Isaiah, Isaiah has a vision of God in His throne room. As Isaiah sees the scene of the Lord sitting upon a throne, we read **"And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke."** Like a washer on the spin cycle, the Lord wrings out the old at His very presence.

This is what the Church year is all about, recounting the story of the God who keeps on coming to us to call us to repentance. Just as squeezing a wet rag cannot help but change it, you cannot encounter God without being changed.

This is what gathering as the Church is all about, it's about Jesus wringing out the old. You come here week after week to hear the words of forgiveness from the pastor as Jesus' representative. You gather with other Christians to hear the Bible read and preached. You gather to be in Jesus' true presence as He comes to us through His very body and blood of communion.

We as a congregation strive to have a welcoming community. I as a pastor make it my mission to make this hour or so together on a Sunday an encouraging experience. But I think if the Church is acting as intended, any given Sunday can be a bit challenging and uncomfortable. And that's okay.

Jesus is wringing out the old as His Word of Law calls you to turn from sin. It's not always easy to hear **“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”** Or **“Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.”** When we hear teachings like these from the Epistle lesson, we are often shown how we fail to love and how we sin daily.

Jesus is wringing out the old as the pastor calls out specific sins in the sermon and specifically calls the church to repentance. Oftentimes, you are the one who is stirred up when Jesus arrives on the scene, you don't like things getting shifted around. You like your life the way it is, thank you very much. Because the first thing Jesus does when He arrives in Jerusalem is clean out the temples, and He's here to do some cleaning as He wrings out the old and tears down our idols.

Jesus is wringing out the old as we often gather to confess our sins in preparation for the reception of Holy Communion wherein we admit that we are poor sinners in need of mercy who deserve eternal damnation. Jesus is wringing out the old as the Lord's Supper is an opportunity to examine oneself to see if you are in the faith, and in some cases, we need to turn people away from this meal so Jesus can come to them for salvation and not for their judgment.

Church isn't always easy. It isn't always comfortable. But when Jesus wrings out the old. It's always for the purpose of ringing in the new. II. Jesus rings in the new as His presence brings salvation. Again, as Jesus came into Jerusalem, the crowd cried out, **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”**

Hosanna is a Hebrew word which means “save us.” They were praising Jesus as He came into Jerusalem as a king. Indeed, the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9 reads, **“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”** Matthew leaves out “righteous and having salvation.” That seems like a pretty important part to include!

As we gather in this new year of the Church Year, we remind ourselves why it is we gather in the first place, and that through Jesus being present through His Word and Sacrament, He is ringing in the new. He is ringing in salvation.

This reading of Jesus entering Jerusalem connects the manger to the cross. It reminds us why Jesus was born in the first place. Everybody has a birthday, but only Jesus has come to this Earth as true God to die for your forgiveness. Only Jesus has risen from the dead with an imperishable body never to fade or to decay. That is our hope as Christians when Jesus returns, for that same Easter promise to be fulfilled in us and our fellow believers.

This reading of Jesus also helps us understand that the cross and the congregation are intertwined. Wherever two or more are gathered in Jesus' name, Jesus promises to be present. Wherever the good news of Jesus is proclaimed, Jesus rings in the new with His salvation, sending His Holy Spirit upon you that you can live a renewed and holy life.

There is nothing special about the wood in the altar, pulpit, and pews. We didn't hire special church roofers to put in Christian shingles, plus, who wants a holy roof anyway? The organ isn't a holier instrument than a banjo, trombone, or oboe. Yet it is Jesus' presence that rings in the new here in this place as He comes to us through the Word preached and read, as we sing hymns to His praise, and pray prayers. Jesus is present in this place as we baptize our families at the font. Jesus graces with His true presence at the table as He comes to us in His body and blood in, with and under bread and wine.

And to be certain, we gather here to be shaken up. We gather here to be challenged, but we gather here to be blessed by Jesus' true presence in Word and Sacrament bringing salvation. It is through these means that Jesus rings in the new.

Jesus rings in the new as He has fulfilled the demands of love for you. Jesus rings in the new as He has lived a perfectly chaste and decent life for you. He has lived a sober and peaceful life for you when you couldn't. Before the confession is on your mouth, He has already absolved you, forgiven you, of sins past, present, and future. Jesus wrings out the old so He can show you that He is the one soaking you in grace, peace, and forgiveness.

Jesus rings in the new through His salvific presence in the bread and wine of communion and we come up not as those who have earned our spot, but as repentant sinners knowing that we are in desperate need of Jesus to fill us with His forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And just as news of Jesus' triumphal entry rippled like shockwaves through Jerusalem, the blessings Jesus gives as Christians gather together in worship also ripples through your community.

Jesus rings in the new through His salvific presence in Word and Sacrament, and it doesn't just stay here. Jesus certainly isn't confined to the four walls of a

sanctuary. As you are built up and strengthened by these means of grace, you become part of the crowd on Palm Sunday who gets to spread the word of the coming king to those around you.

The Church is not only about gathering to welcome the coming king who wrings out the old and rings in the new, but as those who have been emptied of sin and filled with God's love, we tell others about this Savior. It could be something as intricate as inviting them to participate in your family devotions at home. It could be something as simple as telling someone, "Jesus loves you." But it is through these means that we act as God's servants in wringing out the old and bringing in the new.

Yes, it might shake things up just as Jesus can't help but stir the pot, but as we are filled with the love of Jesus, we can't help but bring Him with wherever we go. Amen.