

“Casting Cloaks”

First Sunday in Advent

Mark 11:1-10

*“They brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it . . .
And many spread their cloaks on the road” Mark 11: 7-8*

Being from Michigan originally I am almost ashamed to admit that in the mornings at this time of year, I find myself reaching in the closet to grab a coat and putting it on before heading to work. Now, to be sure, by the time noon rolls around I will probably be the first one to shed that coat. But early in the morning, even at 60 degrees or so, I reach for that extra layer. I want the warmth. I seek the comfort. I am looking for that protection that a coat, an extra layer of clothing, brings.

A coat offers us protection from the elements. It protects us from cold weather. A waterproof coat can protect us from rain and snow. We have windbreakers that can protect us from harsh breezes or gusts of wind. Law enforcement officers or military personnel may wear types of bullet proof coats. Men and women of the military who are deployed in the Middle East may wear special kinds of coats that are breathable but at the same time can offer lots of protection from the sun. The list can go on and on. There seem to be coats and jackets made for every occasion. In many cases, the primary purpose of the coat and its design is to give protection to the person wearing it. Protection—that is the characteristic of a coat that I want to emphasize today as we reflect on in our sermon this morning.

In our Gospel reading we see Jesus processing into Jerusalem. By processing into the Holy City as a King during the last week of his Ministry he showed why he has come to earth in the first place. This is why we consider this event of Jesus’ life on *this* Sunday on which we begin the Season of Advent. We emphasize our Lord coming to us and being present among us. In our Gospel reading we see that coats played a role in Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The word shows up in our English Bibles as the word “cloak.” The Greek word that is translated into English as “cloak” is often referring to an outer garment that was worn over a tunic at the time of Jesus. It was worn for warmth. It was worn for protection. In verse 7 of our reading the two disciples lay their garments or cloaks on the colt that Jesus rides into Jerusalem. A verse later we learn that the people laid their garments at the feet of Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. We read, “And many spread their cloaks on the road . . . And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!’” (Mk 11:8-10).

In the Bible we read of an instance in the Old Testament in which the people of Israel laid their cloaks before a king and proclaimed him publicly as their king. The king was named Jehu. His story is told in 2 Kings, chapters nine and ten. We learn that Israel was in need of a good king. That is, a king that would

not lead the people into idolatry. A king that would not lead the people to worship and honor the false gods around them but would worship YHWH, the God of Israel, alone. Jehu was that good king that God raised up at that time to lead his people to honor the first commandment and to have no other gods but him alone. And so God sent a servant of the prophet Elisha who went privately to the house of Jehu, who at the time, was a commander of the army of Israel. In the privacy of a home, this servant of the prophet Elisha anointed Jehu as the King over Israel. When Jehu rose and left that house the people of Israel inquired about what just happened. When the new monarch announced that he was just anointed as their king, the people responded by throwing their garments and laying them at his feet proclaiming him as king (2 Kings 9:13).

In this story with Jehu, the cloaks and coats that were used by the people for protection are now thrown before the one whom the Lord would use as his instrument to protect his people both physically and spiritually. He would be used by God to protect them physically by providing military might. He would be used by God to protect them spiritually by doing away with all of the idols and false prophets that would seek to compete with the one and only God, YHWH, their creator and redeemer.

We also see another example of cloaks being laid down at someone's feet. At the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr of the Christian Church, we read that, after the Jewish people of Jerusalem heard Stephen's sermon and responded by stoning him, "they laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:58). Saul was an official who oversaw and gave approval of Stephen's execution. Before God converted Saul on the road to Damascus and used him to preach Christ throughout the ancient world, the Jewish people laid their cloaks before him. They looked to him to protect them from Christianity.

How do we lay down our cloaks wrongly, putting our ultimate trust for protection and provision in the wrong things? Do we lay our cloaks before the mass of stuff we accumulate, trusting in material wealth to buy us protection and security? Do we lay our cloaks before a political party, trusting in a majority in the House and Senate to change the path of our country? Do we lay our cloaks before our employer or career, expecting job security to ultimately protect and provide? As a Church might we at times lay our cloaks before certain things thinking that then the Church will grow? Do we lay our cloaks before just the right amount of tithes or the certain type of songs or the right event or the ideal average worship attendance?

During Jesus' Palm Sunday procession the disciples and the crowd at least had this much right: If our cloaks are going to be laid before anyone, we are to lay them before Jesus, the true King. We are to use them in service of the true King of Israel. This King is the one who came, who still comes to us and will come again—Our Advent King as the opening hymn reminded us. He is the king who comes in humility to bring peace. He is the King who comes to Jerusalem to clothe his people and the whole world in the forgiveness, righteousness, and peace of God. But his people and the whole world would not receive their King. Instead they forced off his cloak and stripped him of his garments. They cast lots for his

garments as the King of the Jews hung lifeless on a cross (Mk 15:24). The sweet hosannas of the Sunday prior are now drowned out with the emphatic cry on the Friday following, "crucify him!"

This King comes for a world that so quickly lays their garments before other gods, expressing their loyalty in other things, fearing, loving, and trusting in that which they fashion for themselves and their fleeting desires decide to pursue. This king lays his cloak before his Father in perfect obedience and trust and he drinks the cup of judgment and wrath. Our cup. And he dies. And he purchases your forgiveness. And he gives his love. And then he rises to give you his life. And then he clothes you with his righteousness. He lays his garment of righteousness at the bottom of a baptismal font where you receive it and put it on. As Paul reminds us in Galatians, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27).

Now we join in with the cry of sweet hosanna in our worship. Here on Sunday mornings we echo this cry, as we will this morning, before we receive the body and blood of our Lord as he marches to our altar to come to us in our holy city, our holy place where he meets us. We join with the voices of the crowds in Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday. We lay our cloaks before him in loving faith and trust as we receive his grace and respond with willingness to serve our King in loyalty, in honor, in respect, in meeting the needs of all who have need. Just as Jesus has met our needs in Christ, we then meet the needs of others. When Jesus instructed his two disciples to go retrieve the colt on which he would ride into the Holy City, he told them to say these words to those who would ask why they are taking the colt: "The Lord has need of it . . ." (Mk 11:3). This is what servants of God do. This is what we do. Laying our cloaks before the Lord we see needs and ask how God can use us to meet them. Clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Wrapped in the cloak of his forgiveness. Amen.