

“Two Kingdoms”

November 25, 2018: The Feast of Christ the King

[Daniel 7:9-10,13-14](#); [Revelation 1:4b-8](#); [John 18:33-37](#)

In November two years ago, a friend wrote a hymn that we will be singing together at this service a couple times next month. It begins:

*Light is kindled in the darkness when our hope seems most absurd,
beacons through a shrouded future, pledges of Christ's steadfast word:
gifts of goodness yet enfold us--all around, beneath, above--
signs of beauty still persisting, symbols of God's constant love.*

*Though the wrong appears victorious--violence, prejudice, and pride--
hope still rises from the wreckage; joy and grief stand side by side.
We will feel both pain and promise, terror's sting and love's new birth,
as we walk in joy and shadow on God's blessed and bleeding earth.*

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of two kingdoms: one in which the wrong indeed appears victorious, marked by violence, prejudice, and pride, shrouded in terror and grief, in which it seems altogether absurd to hope. And Jesus speaks of another “kingdom” in which hope reigns, God's love persists as light in darkness, and truth heals.

“So you are a king,” Pilate says.

“You say that I am a king. I came into this world to testify to the truth. But my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is,” Jesus continues puzzlingly, “my kingdom is not from here.”

What does it mean for Jesus' kingdom to be “not from here”?

I generally have thought that he's renouncing the worldly kingdom that is blaming and condemning him; that he is drawing a line in the sand and saying that if such conflict were happening in his kingdom, then of course his followers would fight, but since it is happening in that other kingdom, they are not.

Or, as a colleague has suggested, might it mean that “were he and his followers of this world, then naturally they would use the primary tool [of this world]...violence. But Jesus is not of this world and so Jesus will not defend himself through violence...establish his claims through violence...[or] usher in God's kingdom through violence...”

Rather, Jesus has come to witness to the truth...that God is love.”

I think of Martin Luther King Jr's words from 1967, that “the ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”

Where the kingdom of this world employs violence, without thinking, God's kingdom practices non-violence and therefore peace. Where the kingdom of this world shows off its brawn, God's kingdom is disarmingly vulnerable. Where the kingdom of this world thrives on its own wealth and well-being, God's kingdom shines when all have what they need. When the kingdom of this world feasts on the suffering of others, God's kingdom breaks bread and pours wine. Where the kingdom of this world is built upon fear of scarcity, God's kingdom is scaffolded with sacrifice.

As Mary will say, soon, "the strength of God's arm is what scatters the proud, brings down the so-called mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty." Where the kingdom of this world exerts power by force, this kingdom "shares power wisely".

To whom or to what do we ascribe power in our lives? Think of your and our own personal realms of effort, though, energy, time, and money. Where in these, our private and collective realms, does this world reign? Where do fear, insecurity, or privilege wield control? We all have our places.

Yet, as Christians, this is not the end of the story. This is not the final word. For our very next question we must ask ourselves is: Where is the kingdom of God breaking through, as light kindled in darkness? Where is that absurd hope in our shrouded existence? Where do we feel promise in the pain?

I see the kingdom of God here every day, and I hope you do, too. I see the kingdom of God when delicious food is prepared and shared, especially to those who really need it. I see the kingdom of God when the lonely and ill are tended and lifted up; when splendid music and art of all kinds receive us into this "house of the Lord". I see the kingdom of God when generosity exceeds the bounds of worldly reason, when our ancestors all around us encourage us to be bold and imagine beyond ourselves, as they have done for us. Above all I see the kingdom of God when the dying know that they--and we all, always--are held in God's embrace of everlasting life.

This is what it is to live in God's kingdom, and it is in this truth that we are free.