

“Jesus’ Kingdom”

The Rev. Drew Willard
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November 22nd, 2015
*26th Sun. after Pentecost
Reign of Christ Sun/
Thanksgiving*

Daniel 7:1-14

John 18:33-37

*¹⁴ Rule, glory, and kingship were given to him;
all peoples, nations, and languages will serve him.
His rule is an everlasting one— it will never pass away!—
his kingship is indestructible.*

Daniel 7:14

Let us pray... O God,

How do we understand such verses that speak of your sovereignty
over and against the social and political realities of our time?

Acts of human-caused catastrophe have left us appalled at the depths
of what human beings are capable of.

But may we yet be amazed at the heights of what human beings can achieve
in your name we pray...

Amen

A few months before the New Year – and New Millennium of 2000,

I was invited to participate in a panel discussion about apocalyptic literature
at Three Rivers Community College in Norwich, Connecticut.

I was serving as the associate pastor for Mystic Congregational Church at the time
and it seemed like an interesting topic to explore –

considering we Mainline Christians rarely talk about the Apocalypse
let alone preach on it.

Besides myself, there was a Lutheran pastor from the Norwich area,
and a layperson from a mosque in New London.

The Lutheran and I were fairly objective about the significance of the Apocalypse –

I didn't even talk about the Book of Revelation, but focused on what Jesus
had to say about the end-times in Matthew chapter 24, including,

^{4b}Take heed that no one leads you astray.

*⁵For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,'
and they will lead many astray.*

*⁶And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed;
for this must take place, but the end is not yet.*

*⁷For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom,
and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places:*

⁸all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs.

I also spoke of the third parable in Matthew chapter 25 that includes this teaching:

“When you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me.”

Willard, p.2

Psalm 22 is another alternative text that speaks about the time to come – opening with imagery of being captive in the hands of violent enemies, but ending with vindication and restoration in the heavenly assembly. This psalm begins with words that Jesus cried out from the cross, ‘Eli, Eli! Lama sabachthani!’ ‘My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?’

The lay cleric from the mosque seemed very shy – almost apologetic, at first. However, when it was his turn to speak, he launched into a tirade about God’s retribution with such vehemence that it took us all by surprise.

No one said a thing in response – being somewhat shocked and even impressed by his passion.

This was before the events of September 11th, 2001, so this experience has served to give me some insight about the kind of teaching and preaching that was probably common in mosques back then.

Since then, there have been many armed conflicts out of which a radicalized ISIS movement has emerged that seeks to re-establish a ‘caliphate’ – a religious kingdom that in medieval times included the Middle East and North Africa. This so-called Islamic State has succeeded militarily in gaining a foothold in war torn Syria and Iraq, and now striking out at defenseless people of nations beyond these borders, while continuing to attract disaffected young people to its ranks.

Once again, terrorists have attacked vulnerable people, Paris, with 130 people dead and more than 300 wounded. Shortly before that, 41 people were killed in Beirut, Lebanon, and 27 people were killed in Bamako, Mali just days ago. In April, 147 college students were killed in Garissa, Kenya. In January of this year, 2,000 people were killed Baga, Nigeria.

With each new atrocity, the free world is increasingly poised for war, unifying to strike back with violence... and fulfill ISIS’ apocalyptic narrative to provoke a final showdown with the so-called ‘infidel’.

Violence appears to be an inevitable part of the response, but this may only help ISIS attract more young people who seek something to serve as a cause greater than themselves...

In the 1960s, America youth from a wide variety of ethnic and religious groups were also drawn to causes greater than themselves – the Civil Rights movement and later the Anti-War movement. That had been a very divisive time in the history of our country with many cultural and legal traditions challenged right along with justice issues.

Willard, p.3

Demonstrations were – with some exceptions, nonviolent;
and eventually succeeded in changing public opinion to oppose
racist segregation in the South and the War in Vietnam.

So, what did it take to stir up a generation to take to the streets –
not just to protest, but to work for a better world?

That time is at hand again for people to get involved,
to become ‘radical extremists’ – but in a different way, a non-violent way.

Jesus started his ministry by teaching and preaching
about God’s Kingdom of Heaven, often using parables as a way
to explain his message in an entertaining way.

He demonstrated this ‘kingdom’ by unselfishly helping people –
saving them from that which was most terrifying of their time:
blindness, deafness, paralysis, epilepsy, disease, hunger,
exclusion, poverty, corrupt authorities, the Roman Empire,
storms at sea, evil spirits, death itself – basically, the ‘powers that be’.

In this way, we can see that God is like Jesus –
as opposed to an angry overlord who demands compliance.

Instead, we have a God who loves us – who wants us to be truly alive.

In the time to come, we will be our own judges
when we must look at ourselves in the light of that love.

After the events of Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to Heaven,
Christians ventured to bring the Good News throughout the Roman Empire.

So, the Apostle Paul prudently avoided such terms as ‘kingdom’ – or ‘empire’
in his sermons and epistles, but spoke of inviting people to be ‘in Christ’,
to be part of the ‘Body of Christ’.

We used this language last week when we received new members, saying:

Hear these words from Paul in Ephesians 2:

*‘You are no longer strangers and sojourners,
but you are equally citizens with the saints and
members of the household of God,
built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,
Christ Jesus alone being the cornerstone,
in whom the whole structure is joined together
and grows into a holy temple in Christ;
in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place
of God in the Spirit.’*

In this passage, the Greek words for this specific phrase, ‘in Christ’,
actually is ‘in the Lord’ – however, we Christians understand
the ‘Lord’ of the Jewish people and ‘Christ’ to be interchangeable;
And if we substituted the word, ‘love’, then to be ‘in Christ’ is to be ‘in love’.

Willard, p.4

Another example of being 'in Christ' can be found in Romans 6:3-11,
which are words that I use in liturgy for funerals...

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?*

*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death,
so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,
we too might walk in newness of life.*

*For if we have been united with him in a death like his,
we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.*

Nineteen hundred years later, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
proclaimed his dream for an integrated society as the goal of
the Civil Rights movement for African-Americans.

He spoke of it as a vision for Beloved Community
a term that originated with Josiah Royce,
the founder of the Fellowship Of Reconciliation.

But it is also an inclusive term for what Jesus called
the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, as an achievable social reality,
that takes the words of the Lord's Prayer literally,
'Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven'.

Therefore, Dr. King's dream is not just for America, but can have and is having
application throughout the world – God's Kingdom 'in Christ',
a Beloved Community of justice and peace.

The Beloved Community is what we as a congregation aspire to be –
recognizing that this is not a utopia where everybody gets along all the time,
but a dynamic process taking into account the reality of human conflict.

The difference is in the commitment to resolve conflict nonviolently
leading to reconciliation rather than endless cycles of revenge and bitterness.
This is a form of warfare with the end result of transforming enemies into friends,
fighting and defeating evil, while remembering the oppressor is as much
a prisoner of oppression as those who are victimized.

Based on Dr. King's philosophy and experience in his campaign for civil rights,
there are six characteristics of nonviolence as a strategy for achieving
Beloved Community – which can be found on the website for
The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta,
also called "The King Center"...

Willard, p.5

First,

Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.

Second,

Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding... redemption and reconciliation...[and] the creation of the Beloved Community.

Third,

Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice not people.

Fourth,

Unearned suffering is redemptive... [even] educational and [has]transforming possibilities.

Fifth,

Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate... [L]ove [that] is spontaneous, unmotivated, unselfish and creative.

Finally,

Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice... that justice will eventually win... [because] God is a God of justice.

How can we do this? How could we practice 'nonviolence' and help Jesus' Kingdom of Beloved Community to happen – here and everywhere?

There are six 'steps' for putting nonviolent strategies of love into action, but this is more repetitive or cyclical, rather than a linear progression – as in 'no matter who you or where you are' on the journey for justice...

First,

Gather information and get educated about the issues at hand, especially about your opponent's rationale.

Second,

Educate others, allies and opponents alike, to minimize misunderstanding and gain understanding and empathy.

Third,

Be personally committed, daily examining your faith, philosophy, and motivation to eliminate your own agendas and prepare for suffering if need be, in the fight for justice.

Fourth,

Engage in discussion and negotiation by also using humor, patience, and wit to confront without humiliation, while appealing to the opponent's goodwill.

Fifth,

When talk doesn't work, take nonviolent action to put 'moral pressure' on the opponent and provoke a resolution of the injustice.

Sixth,

Reconcile to transform the opponent into a friend, through rational compromise creating a 'plan of action' that leads to the 'Beloved Community.'

Willard, p.6

ISIS is a 'mine canary' – one of several that are telling the whole world that something is wrong.

They are just the symptom for a bigger problem of rampant neglect in the world's economic system and corruption in local political systems that allows thuggery to get a foothold when there is a vacuum of power. Poverty, prejudice, and persecution of the vulnerable are symptoms of the disease and the treatment that is needed is both the medicine and the end goal.

When you set off on the journey towards Beloved Community, you are already there.

When you employ the skills of nonviolence as a form of direct action you are already there.

When you show compassion as radical loving-kindness in the form of radical thanksgiving and radical forgiveness, you are already there...

Dr. King said there was nothing wrong with being 'extremist' in this way.

There is nothing wrong with waging 'war' by getting educated, educating others, daily preparing oneself spiritually, confronting others through dialogue, and if need be, making them uncomfortable through 'moral pressure', but being quick to reconcile when the opportunity arises – because everybody, then, everybody wins.

Friends,

Jesus' Kingdom has practical applications which Martin Luther King demonstrated, which Mahatma Gandhi demonstrated before him, which Malala Yousafzai is demonstrating these days, and which Jesus of Nazareth demonstrated before them all.

We are being forced through the impersonal scourge of ISIS to come together and recognize our common humanity despite our religious, ethnic, nationalistic, political, and tribal differences.

We are being forced to recognize the dangers of allowing poverty, prejudice, and violent persecution here as well as overseas as a kind of 'climate change' that will turn the world into a wasteland, if we don't do something about it.

But when we do something about the world's pain, then...

They will know we are Christians by our love [3X]

And [as] we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

We will work with each other; We will work side by side.

And we'll guard [everyone's] dignity and save [everyone's] pride.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, our love;

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love...

<http://www.metrolyrics.com/theyll-know-we-are-christians-by-our-love-lyrics-jars-of-clay.html>

Amen

*Our lesson from Daniel 7:1-14 is an example of apocalyptic literature
with terrifying imagery of four monsters arising from the sea –
but also a mysterious human being who appears from the clouds...*

¹In the first year of Babylon's King Belshazzar, Daniel had a dream—
a vision in his head as he lay on his bed. He wrote the dream down.

Here is the beginning of the account:

²I am Daniel. In the vision I had during the night I saw the four winds of heaven
churning the great sea.

³Four giant beasts emerged from the sea, each different from the others.

⁴The first was like a lion with eagle's wings.

I observed it until its wings were pulled off,
and it was lifted up from the ground.

It was then set on two feet, like a human being,
and it received a human mind.

⁵Then I saw another beast, a second one, like a bear.

It was raised on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth.

It was told: "Get up! Devour much flesh!"

⁶I kept watching, and suddenly there was another beast, this one like a leopard.

On its back it had four wings like bird wings. This beast had four heads.

Authority was given to it.

⁷After this, as I continued to watch this night vision, I saw a fourth beast,
terrifying and hideous, with extraordinary power

and with massive iron teeth. As it ate and crushed,
its feet smashed whatever was left over.

It was different from all the other beasts before it, and it had ten horns.

⁸I was staring at the horns when, suddenly,

another small horn came up between them.

Three of the earlier horns were ripped out to make room for it.

On this new horn were eyes like human eyes

and a mouth that bragged and bragged.

⁹As I was watching, thrones were raised up. The ancient one took his seat.

His clothes were white like snow; his hair was like a lamb's wool.

His throne was made of flame; its wheels were blazing fire.

¹⁰A river of fire flowed out from his presence; thousands upon thousands served him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood ready to serve him!

The court sat in session; the scrolls were opened.

¹¹ I kept watching.

I watched from the moment the horn started bragging until the beast was killed and its body was destroyed, handed over to be burned with fire.

¹² Then the authority of the remaining beasts was brought to an end, but they were given an extension among the living for a set time and season.

¹³ As I continued to watch this night vision of mine, I suddenly saw one like a human being coming with the heavenly clouds. He came to the ancient one and was presented before him.

¹⁴ Rule, glory, and kingship were given to him; all peoples, nations, and languages will serve him. His rule is an everlasting one— it will never pass away!— his kingship is indestructible.

Let us be challenged and guided by these words...

John 18:33-37

28 Then they led Jesus from the house of Ca'iaphas to the praetorium.

It was early.

They themselves did not enter the praetorium,
so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover.

29 So Pilate went out to them and said,

“What accusation do you bring against this man?”

30 They answered him,

“If this man were not an evildoer,
we would not have handed him over.”

31 Pilate said to them,

“Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.”

The [Judeans] said to him,

“It is not lawful for us to put [anyone] to death.”

32 This was to fulfil the word which Jesus had spoken
to show by what death he was to die.

33 Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him,

“Are you the King of the Jews?”

34 Jesus answered,

“Do you say this of your own accord,
or did others say it to you about me?”

35 Pilate answered,

“Am I a Jew?”

Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me;
what have you done?”

36 Jesus answered,

“My kingship is not of this world;
if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight,
that I might not be handed over to the [Judeans];
but my kingship is not from the world.”

37 Pilate said to him,

“So you are a king?”

Jesus answered,

“You say that I am a king.
For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world,
to bear witness to the truth.
Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.”

38 Pilate said to him,

“What is truth?”

THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

“The Beloved Community” is a term that was first coined in the early days of the 20th Century by the philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce, who founded the Fellowship of Reconciliation. However, it was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., also a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, who popularized the term and invested it with a deeper meaning which has captured the imagination of people of goodwill all over the world.

For Dr. King, The Beloved Community was not a lofty utopian goal to be confused with the rapturous image of the Peaceable Kingdom, in which lions and lambs coexist in idyllic harmony. Rather, The Beloved Community was for him a realistic, achievable goal that could be attained by a critical mass of people committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence. Dr. King’s Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Dr. King’s Beloved Community was not devoid of interpersonal, group or international conflict. Instead he recognized that conflict was an inevitable part of human experience. But he believed that conflicts could be resolved peacefully and adversaries could be reconciled through a mutual, determined commitment to nonviolence. No conflict, he believed, need erupt in violence. And all conflicts in The Beloved Community should end with reconciliation of adversaries cooperating together in a spirit of friendship and goodwill.

As early as 1956, Dr. King spoke of The Beloved Community as the end goal of nonviolent boycotts. As he said in a speech at a victory rally following the announcement of a favorable U.S. Supreme Court Decision desegregating the seats on Montgomery’s busses, “the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men.” An ardent student of the teachings of Mohandas K. Gandhi, Dr. King was much impressed with the Mahatma’s befriending of his adversaries, most of whom professed profound admiration for Gandhi’s courage and intellect. Dr. King believed that the age-old tradition of hating one’s opponents was not only immoral, but bad strategy which perpetuated the cycle of revenge and retaliation. Only nonviolence, he believed, had the power to break the cycle of retributive violence and create lasting peace through reconciliation.

In a 1957 speech, *Birth of A New Nation*, Dr. King said, “The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community. The aftermath of nonviolence is redemption. The aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation. The aftermath of violence is emptiness and bitterness.” A year later, in his first book *Stride Toward Freedom*, Dr. King reiterated the importance of nonviolence in attaining The Beloved Community. In other words, our ultimate goal is integration, which is genuine inter-group and inter-personal living. Only through nonviolence can this goal be attained, for the aftermath of nonviolence is reconciliation and the creation of the Beloved Community.

In his 1959 *Sermon on Gandhi*, Dr. King elaborated on the after-effects of choosing nonviolence over violence: “The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, so that when the battle’s over, a new relationship comes into being between the oppressed and the oppressor.” In the same sermon, he contrasted violent versus nonviolent resistance to oppression. “The way of acquiescence leads to moral and spiritual suicide. The way of violence leads to bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. But, the way of non-violence leads to redemption and the creation of the beloved community.”

The core value of the quest for Dr. King's Beloved Community was agape love. Dr. King distinguished between three kinds of love: eros, "a sort of aesthetic or romantic love"; philia, "affection between friends" and agape, which he described as "understanding, redeeming goodwill for all," an "overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative" ... "the love of God operating in the human heart." He said that "Agape does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people...It begins by loving others for their sakes" and "makes no distinction between a friend and enemy; it is directed toward both...Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community."

In his 1963 sermon, *Loving Your Enemies*, published in his book, *Strength to Love*, Dr. King addressed the role of unconditional love in struggling for the beloved Community. "With every ounce of our energy we must continue to rid this nation of the incubus of segregation. But we shall not in the process relinquish our privilege and our obligation to love. While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community."

One expression of agape love in Dr. King's Beloved Community is justice, not for any one oppressed group, but for all people. As Dr. King often said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." He felt that justice could not be parceled out to individuals or groups, but was the birthright of every human being in the Beloved Community. I have fought too long hard against segregated public accommodations to end up segregating my moral concerns," he said. "Justice is indivisible."

In a July 13, 1966 article in *Christian Century Magazine*, Dr. King affirmed the ultimate goal inherent in the quest for the Beloved Community: "I do not think of political power as an end. Neither do I think of economic power as an end. They are ingredients in the objective that we seek in life. And I think that end of that objective is a truly brotherly society, the creation of the beloved community"

In keeping with Dr. King's teachings, The King Center embraces the conviction that the Beloved Community can be achieved through an unshakable commitment to nonviolence. We urge you to study Dr. King's six principles and six steps of nonviolence, and make them a way life in your personal relationships, as well as a method for resolving social, economic and political conflicts, reconciling adversaries and advancing social change in your community, nation and world.

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy#sthash.h9xoe3ei.dpuf>

Here are the principles and steps for achieving Beloved Community as posted by The King Center:

SIX PRINCIPLES OF NONVIOLENCE

Fundamental tenets of Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence described in his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom*. The six principles include:

PRINCIPLE ONE: Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people.

It is active nonviolent resistance to evil. It is aggressive spiritually, mentally and emotionally.

PRINCIPLE TWO: Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.

The end result of nonviolence is redemption and reconciliation.

The purpose of nonviolence is the creation of the Beloved Community.

PRINCIPLE THREE: Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice not people.

Nonviolence recognizes that evildoers are also victims and are not evil people.

The nonviolent resister seeks to defeat evil not people.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: Nonviolence holds that suffering can educate and transform.

Nonviolence accepts suffering without retaliation.

Unearned suffering is redemptive and has tremendous educational and transforming possibilities.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate.

Nonviolence resists violence of the spirit as well as the body.

Nonviolent love is spontaneous, unmotivated, unselfish and creative.

PRINCIPLE SIX: Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.

The nonviolent resister has deep faith that justice will eventually win.

Nonviolence believes that God is a God of justice.

SIX STEPS OF NONVIOLENT SOCIAL CHANGE *The Six Steps for Nonviolent Social Change are based on Dr. King's nonviolent campaigns and teachings that emphasize love in action. Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence, as reviewed in the Six Principles of Nonviolence, guide these steps for social and interpersonal change.*

INFORMATION GATHERING: To understand and articulate an issue, problem or injustice facing a person, community, or institution you must do research. You must investigate and gather all vital information from all sides of the argument or issue so as to increase your understanding of the problem. You must become an expert on your opponent's position.

EDUCATION: It is essential to inform others, including your opposition, about your issue. This minimizes misunderstandings and gains you support and sympathy.

PERSONAL COMMITMENT: Daily check and affirm your faith in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence. Eliminate hidden motives and prepare yourself to accept suffering, if necessary, in your work for justice.

DISCUSSION/NEGOTIATION: Using grace, humor and intelligence, confront the other party with a list of injustices and a plan for addressing and resolving these injustices. Look for what is positive in every action and statement the opposition makes. Do not seek to humiliate the opponent but to call forth the good in the opponent.

DIRECT ACTION: These are actions taken when the opponent is unwilling to enter into, or remain in, discussion/negotiation. These actions impose a "creative tension" into the conflict, supplying moral pressure on your opponent to work with you in resolving the injustice.

RECONCILIATION: Nonviolence seeks friendship and understanding with the opponent.

Nonviolence does not seek to defeat the opponent. Nonviolence is directed against evil systems, forces, oppressive policies, unjust acts, but not against persons. Through reasoned compromise, both sides resolve the injustice with a plan of action. Each act of reconciliation is one step close to the 'Beloved Community.'

Based on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" in Why We Can't Wait, Penguin Books, 1963.

We often view the Six Steps as a phases or cycles of a campaign rather than steps because each of them embodies a cluster or series of activities related to each of the other five elements.

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy#sthash.h9xoe3ei.H6vQqHzC.dpuf>

"They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love" was written by Peter Scholtes.

We are one in the Spirit

We are one in the Lord

We are one in the Spirit

We are one in the Lord

And we pray that all unity may one day be restored

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love

We will work with each other

We will work side by side

We will work with each other

We will work side by side

And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

Yeah, they'll know we are Christians by our love, our love

By our love, our love, by our love, our love, by our love, our love

By our love, by our love, by our love, our love

by our love

<http://www.metrolyrics.com/theyll-know-we-are-christians-by-our-love-lyrics-jars-of-clay.html>