

“Kingdom Come”

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Reign of Christ
Rev. 19:9-21, Jn 18:33-38

*On the part of the robe that covered his thigh was written,
“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”*

Rev. 19:16

Let us pray... O God,
Help us to see that your Word is not a fairytale, but can break down lies.
Help us to show forth your love as the best way to overcome evil.
Help us to be your people in this time & place.

Amen

As the armies of good & evil square off against each other,
a ‘Rider on a White Horse’ appears, who is obviously Jesus Christ.
*On the part of the robe that covered his thigh was written,
“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”*

Rev. 19:16

The next verse is an odd “invitation”:
*I then saw an angel standing on the sun,
and he shouted to all the birds flying in the sky,
“Come and join in God’s great feast!*

Rev. 19:17

Sounds good – until we hear what was on the menu:
*You can eat the flesh of kings, rulers, leaders, horses, riders, free people, slaves,
important people, and everyone else.”*

Rev. 19:18

This is one of those really hard Biblical texts to understand – let alone listen to.
My best speculation as to what this means is that
the kind of birds this angel is talking to... are turkeys!
Justice finally prevails – even for turkeys...

What follows is the second to last battle –there’s still one more,
but the good guys will win that one, too.
There’s a lot of violence in this story,
but maybe there is another way to look at what all this means.
For that matter, there’s been a lot of violence in our world’s history & current events,
but it doesn’t have to always be that way – as we go forward...

Have you been to the movies lately?
Have you noticed anything different these days –
Oh, besides zombie attacks and bathroom humor?
Talking about violence, have you noticed just how much more violent they are –
and I’m only talking about the previews of coming attractions...

Willard, p.2

Vicious martial arts scenes are well-seasoned with an unhealthy dose of humiliating victims, which somehow passes for entertainment. Now, you might well say, 'No wonder society is in the shape it's in' – as if the movies are the reason for murder and other crimes, except that people are choosing to pay to see these films. They make this morning's reading from Revelation 19 seem tame like a fairytale.

Actually, fairytales are not so tame...

like the '3 Little Pigs', where the Big Bad Wolf eats two of the pigs before sliding down the 3rd pig's chimney and right into a boiling stew. Then, there's the Wicked Witch of the Gingerbread House, who plans on having two lost kids for dinner – as the main course! They turn the tables on her, though, and she winds up in the oven instead! You might think that a steady diet of such fairytale stories would not be very healthy inspiration.

But fairytales have served over the millennia to help children in Western cultures deal with the unpleasant realities in life.

I expect that may be a possible explanation – and use for, such popular, gruesome movies, but I do not recommend watching them. Even the ones with women as heroes has them just as brutal as men! Again, maybe girls growing up in our society these days need to see Wonder Woman clobbering Nazis or Katniss of "The Hunger Games" defying her enemies as a warrior.

Regarding today's lesson from Revelation,

I want to point out that the Rider on the White Horse slays enemies with a 'sword that came from his mouth'. That suggests that there is another way of looking at this text – that it is meant to be taken symbolically. From that perspective, the enemies of God are ultimately subdued – nonviolently *by words*, their leaders are captured, and their influence is neutralized. So, this Rider on the White Horse – who is called the 'King of Kings', is a very different kind of 'king' which is not like violent heroes of the past or those of the movie thrillers of our present...

Willard, p.3

‘Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven’...

This is what we pray for every week,

and for which Christians have been praying for 2,000 years.

Jesus Christ is that Rider on the White Horse

and he is that ‘King of Kings and LORD of Lords’

who overcomes his enemies with the ‘sword’ of his mouth.

Jesus is ‘Lord’, but in our time, there are no more ‘lords’ in our world –
at least not in the sense that was true back then.

There are still ‘strong men’, ‘drug czars’, ‘CEOs’, and ‘warlords’,
but not in the sense of being ‘the Lord’ that Jesus is for us.

Contemporary religious writer Dominc Crossan

theorizes that Jesus’ followers began to use terms like ‘Lord’ and

‘Son of God’ as a way to define him over and against
the Roman Emperor Caesar.

He goes so far as to say that Jesus was proclaiming a ‘Topsy Turvy Kingdom’
where the last are first and the first are last, and the ‘least of these’ –
who are the minority on social margins are the top priority, and
that the leader washes the feet of the servants,
and the hero-king doesn’t ride into town on a white horse,
but a donkey.

Crossan talks about the ‘Kingdom’ that Jesus was seeking to establish
as being in sharp contest with the ‘domination system’ of the Roman Empire,
which is described as using military and economic suppression
while using religion to legitimize even bad behavior as coming from God –
making it harder to disagree with, that way...

In our Gospel lesson today from John 18,

we find Jesus in the inner lair of the Roman governor Pilate’s residence,
being interrogated by him.

Pilate was not a pleasant fellow, but ruthless.

At first, he mocks Jesus but then seems to be willing to listen and hear Jesus...

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?”*

Willard, p.4

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 Jews;
but my kingship is not from the world.”*

This could mean just what it says literally:
that his servants – including angels and disciples,
would rise up violently to defend him.

However, Jesus says:
but my kingship is not from the world.”

He is working to upend the ‘domination system’ kingdom of fear
and establish the ‘Beloved Community’ of God’s Kingdom –
and that is something very different.

Then, Jesus says to Pilate,
*“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?”*

This is the key for understanding how Jesus’ “kingship” works:
He has come to re-assert the authority of truth
from the top down, over and against
the religious & political propaganda of that time – and for all time.
Jesus “slays” his enemies with words,
such as the ‘rule of law’ – or in our time, scientific findings
to re-affirm sanity and to prevail over lies.
The administration of Jesus’ “kingship” has been delegated horizontally to us
to do through loving-kindness –
interpret the law with a bias for empathy.

This is how we need to look at scripture – to unpack what it has to say
and reapply it for the challenges of our time.

Going back to the bird ‘feast’ in Revelations,
there is another way of interpreting this text.

It re-establishes a recognition of the natural cycle of life and death –
that in this world, death is a great equalizer
of the great and the least among us.

The birds are part of the natural order that recycles, repurposes,
restores, and renews life on Earth.

Willard, p.5

The author of Revelation may very well have wanted
to celebrate the grisly end of the enemies of the Early Church.
To some extent that is the purpose of apocalyptic literature –
to comfort people with dramatic tales of dragon-slayers.
But from our perspective as Christians of the 21st Century,
a bias for love is needed to promote justice & peace –
not just looking for a silver lining to serve up as pabulum,
to dig deep for creative ways that can make a difference
for personal salvation from pain and fear,
as well as social transformation from poverty and extremism.

The figurative ‘birds’ of this text have their job to do as part of the natural order,
but we are called to a different mission in service to
the ‘King of Kings and LORD of Lords’ –
who speaks from the authority of truth and administers that ‘kingship’,
through human beings, making us equals in the struggle
for justice & peace; and who invite us to a different kind of ‘feast’
where everyone has a place at the King’s table
where all are fed – not by bread alone,
but by every nourishing Word that God is still speaking...

Here’s how you can do that this holiday season:

Don’t just *Buy presents* – *Be present*

Don’t just *Wrap gifts* – *Wrap someone in a hug*

Don’t just *Send gifts* – *Send peace*

Don’t just *Shop for food* – *Donate food*

Don’t just *See the lights* – *Be the light*

Amen

*Our lesson today from 19:9-21 is from the Apostle John's vision
of how the authority of Christ will prevail – despite the violent imagery...*

- ⁹Then the angel told me,
“Put this in writing.
God will bless everyone who is invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.”
The angel also said,
“These things that God has said are true.”
- ¹⁰I knelt at the feet of the angel and began to worship him. But the angel said,
“Don't do that! I am a servant, just like you
and everyone else who tells about Jesus. Don't worship anyone but God.
Everyone who tells about Jesus does it by the power of the Spirit.”
- ¹¹I looked and saw that heaven was open, and a white horse was there.
Its rider was called Faithful and True,
and he is always fair when he judges or goes to war.
- ¹²He had eyes like flames of fire,
and he was wearing a lot of crowns.
His name was written on him,
but he was the only one who knew what the name meant.
- ¹³The rider wore a robe that was covered with blood,
and he was known as “The Word of God.”
- ¹⁴He was followed by armies from heaven that rode on horses
and were dressed in pure white linen.
¹⁵From his mouth a sharp sword went out to attack the nations.
He will rule them with an iron rod
and will show the fierce anger of God All-Powerful
by trampling the grapes in the pit where wine is made.
- ¹⁶On the part of the robe that covered his thigh was written,
“KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”
- ¹⁷I then saw an angel standing on the sun,
and he shouted to all the birds flying in the sky,
“Come and join in God's great feast!
- ¹⁸You can eat the flesh of kings, rulers, leaders, horses, riders, free people, slaves,
important people, and everyone else.”
- ¹⁹I also saw the beast and all kings of the earth come together.
They fought against the rider on the white horse and against his army.
- ²⁰But the beast was captured and so was the false prophet.
This is the same prophet who had worked miracles for the beast,
so that he could fool everyone who had the mark of the beast
and worshiped the idol.
The beast and the false prophet were thrown alive into a lake of burning sulfur.
- ²¹But the rest of their army was killed
by the sword that came from the mouth of the rider on the horse.
Then birds stuffed themselves on the dead bodies.

John 18:33-37 [RSV]

- 33 Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him,
“Are you the King of the Jews?”
- 34 Jesus answered,
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or did others say it to you about me?”
- 35 Pilate answered,
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Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me;
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- 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 Jews;
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- 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.”
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