

Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14
Revelation 1: 4b-8
John 18: 33 – 37
Last Pentecost, Proper 29

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Bainbridge Island, Washington
November 22, 2015

“A Kingdom Not From Here”

Later this morning, I will be preaching a children’s sermon because it is Kid’s First Sunday – one of those Sundays during the year when we invite our children to take a bigger part in our worship service than usual. I am never quite sure what makes a children’s sermon special– is one supposed to be funnier than usual, is the sermon supposed to be shorter than usual, or simply more appealing and understandable than usual? And, if so, why aren’t all sermons like that – why should children have all the fun?

So, I am working on the following - combining Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and Edgar Allen Poe’s story of the Purloined Letter into one sermon explaining the Feast of Christ the King. This is my final dress rehearsal.

We stand this Sunday at the end of our church year. Today is the last Sunday after Pentecost; next Sunday our new liturgical year begins and we enter into Advent as we start the story of Jesus all over again. This Sunday is also known as “Christ the King” Sunday and our readings are replete with kingly images and references to thrones and power and authority and might. Throughout Christianity, believers have pondered what the kingdom of God means, how might it be brought about, and how might we understand its implementation in our lives and in our world. We have struggled and continue to struggle with what a kingdom not from here might be and do. And we engage in this discernment as the world around us changes so dramatically; as the world embraces astonishing advances in science and technology while we amuse ourselves with stories of the paranormal and vampires dating our teenagers – think Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and all those people who live in Forks, WA. It appears that we have several kingdoms not from here to contemplate.

Christ Jesus is not a Paranormal. Christ Jesus is not a magician or a warlock or any sort of magical creature invented by human imagination. Nor is He a ruler in the human sense of that term. Lord, Domine, from which we get words like dominate and dominion often implies total control, total power, with no reciprocating obligations. But that is a more contemporary meaning and one that ignores the deep responsibility that those in leadership positions have for those whom they lead. Christ Jesus is the force of love in the world, bringing joy and light and peace to a world that desperately needs it. Christ Jesus is the full embodiment of servant leadership. Christ Jesus stands against business as usual; Christ Jesus exemplifies the theology of abundance; Christ Jesus calls us with every word, every gesture, and every action, to live into a new way of being in the world. Christ Jesus called his followers and calls us right now to a kingdom not from here. It is not a kingdom based on power or control or human domination; it is also not a kingdom based on magic or breaking natural law or sleight of hand tricks.

We are sometimes bedazzled by clever tricks, bright lights, new toys, new adventures, and new powers. We are sometimes distracted by things that do not really fill us up. We sometimes

confuse dominion and affection; we confuse power and belonging. We confuse owning things and loving people.

Pontius Pilate, cultured, sophisticated, educated Roman aristocrat that he was, simply does not get it. For Pilate, it is all about earthly power and domination. His is a hierarchical world. He and Jesus engage in several insults about honor and position and power. Jesus holds his own quite well with Pilate and turns aside the challenges offered by Pilate. Pilate can imagine no other kingdom than the one in which he lives. Pilate knows that kingdom well and is a rising figure in it. Pilate assumes that Christ Jesus lives in that same kingdom and only that kingdom.

We know that Jesus is a king but not at all in the sense of earthly kings, emperors, or monarchs. Christ Jesus is furthest from that notion as is possible. For Christ Jesus is the King of Love. Christ Jesus does not really reside at the top of the universal organizational chart. Christ Jesus is the center of all that is and will ever be. Christ Jesus is the beginning and the end, the turning point, the fulcrum of all creation.

But the kingdom of God also does not turn on magic or the paranormal as we think of it. God's kingdom is very human and very divine, very real and very mysterious, and very close, yet not from here. The kingdom of God is not either-or; it is both-and. It will not require high technology or arcane and mysterious formulas known only to a select few people to bring it into full flower. It will not require secrets; it will not require slinking around in the dark or ancient objects that have been hidden for centuries. That is realm of human fantasy; of a kingdom not like the present one but a kingdom still based on scarcity and human control over one another.

The kingdom of God resides in plain sight and is open to all of us and all of us are invited to step into it. It requires no special knowledge, no exotic phrases, no alchemical potions, and no wands are involved. The kingdom of God does not require a Hogwarts or one ring to rule them all. The kingdom of God is liked the Purloined Letter – if it appears hidden, it is because we don't see it right in front of our eyes.

The way into the kingdom of God is found in our baptismal covenant and requires us to have inquiring and discerning hearts, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and love God, and the gift of joy and wonder in all God's works.

We make this harder than we need to do, sometimes. We think there is great complexity in getting into the kingdom of God. We look for exotic ideas and activities in the belief that the obvious must not be the way. We go on exhausting journeys when the Way of Jesus has been right in front of us all along. It is a challenge to live in the kingdom of God when the rest of the world is heading elsewhere. Simple ways can be challenging to maintain in the face of so many other ways dangled in front of us.

The kingdom of God is not in some exotic corner of the world; the kingdom of God is not found in ancient books written in some arcane language; the kingdom of God is not hidden from sight by magic phrases; the kingdom of God is not open to a mere handful of chosen ones. The kingdom of God is not from here; the kingdom of God is from within our hearts and our minds

and our souls. For this, Christ Jesus came into the world. So it was, is now, and ever shall be.
Amen.