

Last Sunday Pentecost (Christ the King), Year B  
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI  
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Good morning, St. Mark's! Believe it or not, despite the turn of the weather this week that you might not have thoroughly enjoyed or embraced, or despite the harsh realities of our world and country, we as a community of faith, as the Body of Christ here realized in the East Side of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, do have much to celebrate this morning.

On the one hand, in many ways today marks the end of one chapter, as we stand on the precipice of something new. Today is our last Sunday without a priest in charge, and all God's people said "**Amen!**" Next week, when we gather together again after our Thanksgiving festivities, we will do so with Fr. Don Fleischman, along with his wife Gypsy, as part of our family. And as we turn the page, we would do well, I think, to warmly and heartily thank the vestry (for visitors, that's episcopal speak for our church's governing body) for their dedicated work, and for all the hours they put in. That whole process is really a testament to their commitment to the spiritual wellbeing of our community. It's so much more than a board, or a series of business meetings. It's a group of people filled with the Spirit, dedicated to discerning together where the Spirit is leading us. So, truly, vestry, we give you thanks for guiding us toward the next chapter of our shared life. And today, as St. Mark's, we look at closing one chapter, and beginning another.

And on the other hand, today is actually something of a New Year's Eve celebration! At least, sort of. This Sunday, as you likely know, marks the last Sunday of the liturgical year, and when we gather again one week from today, we will officially begin a new year as we start Advent! That season when we look forward, not only to the first coming of Christ, but for the second. And I have to be honest, I kind of dig having a New Year's Eve Party at 8/10 AM.

And as a result of our liturgical change in seasons, we find ourselves today celebrating what is known as "Christ the King" Sunday. This celebration, a Feast borrowed from our siblings in the Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions, and instituted by Pope Pius XI in 1925, I think if I'm honest, in times like ours, can feel more like a prayerful reminder, perhaps more than it is a celebratory feast or party. Don't get me wrong. There are days and seasons in which the truth that Jesus is truly and properly King over and against all other principalities, governments, and powers feels as true and as sure as the ground under our feet. But then there are times when that truth feels more like a distant dream, a vapor that is bent on escaping our grasp, a hope that we have to find our way back to.

If you feel like that today or at times in your life, be assured you are in good company, and fit squarely within the people of God. That seems to be the case with those who would have written and those who would have been the original primary audience of Daniel 7, our Old Testament reading for today.

As scholars will point out, Daniel 7 marks a transition in the book to the apocalyptic half.<sup>1</sup> And in the verses preceding our lesson (1-8) we're given, in a very specific genre of writing, apocalyptic literature, almost a graphic-novel style history of sorts that records the transition of power between various empires that ruled over Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel.<sup>2</sup> It does so by describing these empires as grizzly beasts that rise up, one after the other. We have a lion with eagles' wings, a bear with tusks in its mouth, a leopard with four wings and four heads. And finally, a "terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong" beast, with iron teeth, ten horns, and "eyes in one of the horns." Historically we begin with the Babylonian captivity, which was filled with oppression, forced migrations, destruction of the temple, and more.<sup>3</sup> Power moves to the next beast, the Persian empire, and then to the Macedonian or Greek empire, which had originally come to power by Alexander the Great, with Judean control eventually landing into the hands of Antiochus IV.<sup>4</sup>

And scholars will point out that Daniel 7 came together during the reign of Antiochus IV<sup>5</sup>, a man who, according to Anthea Portier-Young, instituted "a program of state terror, murder, and enslavement and the outlawing of Jewish identity, scriptures, and worship."<sup>6</sup> Scholars remind us how this terrifying oppression is described for us in the book of Maccabees.

It's at this point that our reading picks up. In other words, it's during this time for Judah that a distant dream, a vapor bent on escaping their grasp, a hope that maybe they had to find their way back to time and time again was given to them. Wherein one like "a human being" - another way of saying a Son of Man (a title Jesus used for himself) - comes to make things right, and inaugurate a new, and just, and everlasting reign.

Portier-Young puts it this way, "Even as they saw their houses burned, their loved ones tortured and slaughtered, and their temple profaned by an "abomination that desolates" (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11), Daniel's vision allowed them to see something else: the end of empires, the sovereign power of God, and their own future kingdom."<sup>7</sup>

Why am I saying all of this? What difference does this dream from thousands of years ago make to you and me?

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<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/christ-the-king-2/commentary-on-daniel-79-10-13-14-6>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid and

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/christ-the-king-2/commentary-on-daniel-79-10-13-14-3>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup>

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/christ-the-king-2/commentary-on-daniel-79-10-13-14-3>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Allow me to state the obvious: we live in a world where oppression, state terror, evil, and injustice is a given. It's not a matter of if, but of when, where, and against whom. We do not yet live in a kingdom of justice that will never pass away.

And yet.

We gather each Sunday to worship a Jesus who tells us in today's gospel that, yes, his Kingdom is not from this world, it doesn't originate here, it's beginnings, THANK GOD, come from somewhere else. But that doesn't mean that his reign has nothing to do with this world either. This is not a hope that is detached from lived reality, a vain dream that is reserved only for a later time. This is a hope that disturbs and disrupts the present.

Having hope in the midst of oppression/darkness is not the same thing as choosing to ignore reality, or pretending that everything is fine, or slipping into a un-Christian belief that we don't need to change anything in our world because eventually, one day, God will take care of it. It means to hold on to the dreams we've been given in full view of the terror around us. It's living in the very real darkness of the world, and refusing to give up the truth that a better reality and kingdom has taken root like a mustard tree. Our hope doesn't call us to sit and wait, but to get up, and act in faith.

So when hope seems distant, and it will, and when we are gutted by the devastations of this world, and we will be, may we participate in the very real hope we have by living it day by day.

Amen.