

Year C-Easter 2-2019-Through the Mass Media the Awareness of What Jesus Came to Show Suddenly Spreads Over the Face of the Earth

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Revelation 1:4-8

Through the Mass Media the Awareness of What Jesus Came to Show Suddenly Spread Over the Face of the Earth?!

In John of Patmos' greeting/introduction to Revelation he says Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth. How can he say that in this time when kings all over the face of the earth are making strong bids for their own increase in power? I will attempt an answer. Jesus revealed the mechanism through which all kings hold power by submitting to their power at the crucifixion. In the very same act he also subverted their power, gradually making it ineffective, a movement in history that continues in our day. More and more we are seeing the innocent victims that all worldly powers, kings and prime ministers, depend on for their power.

In our current patch of history we see these victims in the children separated from their parents at the border. Can anyone see them as other than innocent? We see them in those people killed in the Mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, who were Muslims killed by a Christian White Supremacist and those people killed in Sri Lanka who were Christians killed by radical Muslim; the terrorists say it was in retaliation for those killed in Christchurch. All of those killed on both sides were innocent just as Jesus was innocent. Jesus, in his death and resurrection, represented them all. Killings and then retaliation; where will it end?

Of course, we have even twisted our understanding of the victim. The most popular movie right now is "Avenger: End Game." It assumes the heroes are victims and therefore have a right to avenge themselves against those who have wronged them. How can violence in response to violence do anything but increase the hatred and violence in the world? When will it stop, how can it be stopped and who will stop it?

"Father, forgive them for they don't know what they do."

But if we don't stop they will overrun us, destroy our culture, hurt us, and even kill us. Yet we say we believe in Jesus, the resurrection, a God that is beyond death. We say Jesus is the "ruler of the Kings of the earth." Do we really believe that? We say Jesus was the first born of the dead—as though this means the rest of us will be born into his kingdom after him. We say Jesus Christ is the faithful witness who showed us the effervescent, irrepressible and totally benevolent face of God. Do we believe that?

In the Revelation greeting, John of Patmos, exiled to an island off the coast of Asia Minor, a place designed to bring him to despair, writes, "Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before the throne." John of Patmos is not at all despairing. He writes his greeting from a place of Grace, a place where he knows he is complicit with the evils of the world but lives from the forgiveness revealed at the crucifixion and confirmed at the resurrection. Though he is isolated and under threat from the religionists who see him as too radical and the political state that is intent on stamping out his message, he lives in peace and sends them peace that comes from God who transcends time and the "ins" and "outs" of sectarian religion.

And as to the seven Spirits who are before his throne, I really don't know what that means but I would like to make a speculative guess. John of Patmos writes to the seven churches that are in Asia and now we learn there are seven spirits before God's throne. It would seem each one of the seven churches has a different spirit, a different character, a different, unique blend of personalities and relationships with one another and God. God appreciates and engenders difference; color, texture, mission, and purpose. James Alison has a nice way of encapsulating this. He calls it "flexible imitation." We all imitate God, but our imitation is not cookie cutter like, not industrial, one-size-fits all, boring and repetitious. No, our imitation is human, relational, creative and unique. We imitate God as best we can but our own uniqueness is never lost or dishonored. How many churches do you know include a track-hoe ministry or an enriching synergistic relationship with the Grange? How many churches have a pastor interested in working out the relationship of a non-violent peace theology he believes Jesus reveals to humanity for all time and to all persons regardless of their faith or non-faith? He does

this by exploring each week's lectionary text? Like the seven spirits before the throne of God, our unique spirit as a church also stands before God.

I want to skip down now to a text you probably wondered about as it was read. "Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail." He is coming with the clouds like a front coming in from the west. In Nebraska, on the prairie, I would see a line of clouds on the horizon moving east.

Look! It's coming, I would say with some tension in my voice. With these apocalyptic texts from Revelation we assume the movement moving toward us is violent, retributive, punishing; the other shoe we knew would finally drop. God is returning and he is angry.

But what if our feelings and assumptions are all wrong? What if it is a movement of love and insight, a contagion of awareness where we see the futility of our 'us' and 'them' thinking, a realization that violence in response to violence only leads to more violence? And what if not just a few see it but all see it? The text says, "Every eye will see him." And what if even the perpetrators, we who are complicit, "even those who pierced him" see it? What would be the response of the whole earth if all should suddenly gain this insight as it spread from one person to another and from one culture to that culture's enemy?

John of Patmos answers, "And on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail." We have always assumed all the tribes of the earth wail due to their long delayed divine punishment. That reveals more about us than God; it reveals our vindictiveness and misguided belief in the myth of redemptive violence, the "avenger" thinking again. But now I think they are wailing out of grief at the sudden awareness at how much harm they have caused others and themselves with their divisive rather than inclusive way of seeing the world. All the tribes of the world have had a perspective that was tragically in error.

This sudden awareness that comes with the clouds and every eye will see; this manifestation of the meaning of Jesus' life is coming, though it seems as impossible to imagine in our context as it must have been for John of Patmos to see on his exile island. He ends this segment of his thought with, "So it is to be. Amen."

Still we struggle to believe it, right? This mess we are in is not going to end this way, do you think? I have a strong dose of Thomas the Doubter in me. I hope the text from Revelation is right; I hope my interpretation of it is on the money but most of all, my hope is in Jesus alone.

Maybe John of Patmos intuited that we would feel doubtful about Jesus' coming and maybe that's why, under the power of the Spirit he wrote, "I am the Alpha and the Omega", says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'" What if, through the mass media, now spread around the world, the awareness of what Jesus came to show suddenly appeared with the clouds moving toward us and every tribe saw it? Maybe it's the high tech clouds advertised by Apple, Microsoft and Google? John of Patmos did say Jesus would come with the clouds and everyone will see it. Amen.