

Sermon  
Last Pentecost + Christ the King  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
November 21, 2021  
William Bradbury

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14  
Psalm 93  
Revelation 1:4b-8  
John 18:33-37

I'm occasionally asked why I see so many movies. Maybe it's just a lazy way to spend a day off, an escape from being available, but on a deeper level, **watching a good movie—or reading a good book—can become a contemplative experience in which the ego-mind goes quiet, and I'm transported into a different reality, in which Life and Love can be experienced in new ways.**

If you grow up in the valley and never leave the valley, then the valley is all you'll know, but if you can get a view from the mountain your perspective will be changed.

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The reading from Daniel this morning is probably written 160 years before Christ and is a view from the mountain. The Jews are suffering under the persecution of the Greek ruler of Syria and Palestine. In that time of oppression, Daniel has a vision of a heavenly scene of the Ancient One, the Ancient of Days, sitting on a fiery throne and then, he says:

"I saw one like a human being, (like a son of man),  
coming with the clouds of heaven.

And he came to the Ancient One  
and was presented before him.

14 To him was given dominion  
and glory and kingship,  
that all peoples, nations, and languages  
should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
that shall not pass away,  
and his kingship is one  
that shall never be destroyed."

In this reading from Daniel, we are watching, not a romantic comedy, or an historical drama, but what is called an apocalyptic story, what we

might call a fantasy. It's like watching "The Wizard of Oz", in which the imagination is turned on so we can see in color and not be enslaved by a wicked witch or made afraid of a fake Wizard.

The first Christians, who knew Daniel 7 by heart, see the death and resurrection of Jesus as the fulfilling of this vision: one like a "son of man", which is the title Jesus uses for himself, coming on the clouds to the throne room of God where he is given the authority to defeat the beasts that enslave God's people on earth.

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 I like what British author G.K Chesterton wrote a hundred years ago: "Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. **Fairy tales tell children that dragons can be killed.**"

**Think about the movie "The Sound of Music": the Nazi beast is oppressing Austria and wants to rip apart the Von Trappe family. Most families feel hopeless and succumb to the power of the beast, but the sound of music releases God's power to climb every mountain and the family hikes out of the valley into the mountains to escape the beast.**

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 Our second reading, from the Revelation to John, like Daniel, is an apocalyptic—a fantasy, written to create hope in the hearts of oppressed people everywhere: the hope that Jesus is overthrowing the beasts who rule our world.

### **What beast or dragon is keeping you captive?**

Maybe it's a life-threatening illness or a chronic one that never goes away. Maybe it's a financial dragon?

Maybe it's the partisan divide that threatens the stability of our nation.

Maybe it's Covid and its cruel isolation!

Maybe it's a sin whose memory we can't shake?

**Or it's a traumatic event that keeps us trapped in a cycle of negativity.**

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 When we open our imaginations to these apocalyptic stories, they change our mental landscape and reframe our picture of the nature of life.

We've all seen this **transforming and reframing** going on in people around us who once were stuck in narratives of despair and doom and who now live in the peace of God.

Some of the prisoners that come to the Catholic chapel at MCI-Concord have been in prison for decades for doing horrible things, but they are not crazy or violent or living in despair.

### **Why?**

Because their minds are set free by a different story, the story of Christ Crucified, the King of heaven and earth, who loves them and gives himself for them, and who daily destroys the power of the beasts that could easily overwhelm them.

**They've seen the movie of the enthronement of Christ on the Cross so many times they now live inside that story.** They **reside** in the valley of the shadow in prison, but they are **citizens** of God's Reality, where Christ is King and they are the much-beloved children of God.

**As is often said: These men are in prison on the outside, but they are free on the inside.**

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**Jesus awakens our ability to see God's Reality which alone can overcome our dragons.**

**Jesus tells Pilate his kingdom is not from this world. Jesus' Kingdom is FROM heaven, but it is FOR earth.**

**The early Christians living under the persecution of the Roman Empire are not naïve.** They know they are poor, uneducated, and powerless.

But when the movie of the enthronement of Christ Crucified and Risen gets inside their heads, they are made children of God who are free on the inside.

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 Every day when we welcome this vision into our minds and hearts, we have a story to tell about the beasts who are conquered by the Human One and the church can live out its mission, which Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder says is **to form people who live in the presence of Christ is King.** People, so formed, he says, who can:

- + "risk being peaceful in a violent world"
- + "risk being kind in a competitive world"
- + "risk being faithful in an age of cynicism"
- + "risk being gentle among those who admire the tough"

+ "risk love when it may not be returned

He says we can live this way **"because we have the confidence that in Christ we have been reborn into a new reality."**