

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!

I am told by our Church Librarian from conversation with the Book Store that the most popular books in Green Valley are Mysteries! Not Romance novels, not Devotionals, not Biblical Commentaries or Biographies, ...Mysteries. The world is very much with us. We are surrounded by a 24 hour news-cycle, overwhelmed by Social Media. From COVID to Impeachment Trials, we know too much of the hardships and underbelly of life. So we turn to Mysteries, stories which take us outside our reality, to speculate on what if..., to hope and dream. Mystery arises from the same root-word as Mysticism, inspiration of a sense of spirituality, awe and fascination, everything in our world that is partially obscured by MIST. The dictionary defines mystic as "Having understanding not apparent to the senses nor obvious to intelligence; that which is beyond ordinary understanding." Which explains how a horse named MYSTIC DAN could win the Kentucky Derby yesterday at odds against of 18:1. A Mystic is one who has a direct experience of the sacred, unmediated by conventional rituals or intermediaries. Biblical Mysticism is some non-Occult form of contact with the Transcendent Divine, understood in Christian tradition as Union with GOD.

Our Puritan Reformed origins coming to America at the time of The Enlightenment, Presbyterians do not place great emphasis on Mystery, we search to understand. The Book of Daniel and the Ascension of Jesus are mystical experiences of the Messiah, thoroughly grounded in human history. Did these happen? The Word of GOD and Teachings of the Church say they did, in just these ways, which defy rationalism. Each, are experience of spiritual comfort, in times of overwhelming destructive realities. So while 51 Sundays a year, plus Christmas and Holy Week, we try to emphasize rational reasoned thought, this morning we step outside ourselves to consider the Spiritual and Mystical.

Abraham and Sarah and their descendants had come from the Nation of Chaldea, growing to become the Kingdom of Israel. Meanwhile, the Empire of Chaldea split into the Nations of Assyria and Babylon and Media. For 19 years, from 740 to 721 BC, Assyria attacked Israel, tearing down their walls of fortification, eventually overrunning and dispersing the Northern 10 tribes of Israel to the four winds.

150 years afterward, Babylon attacked the Southern Tribes, until they too were decimated. However instead of scattering, Babylon took Judah captive and exiled the Southern Nation as Prisoners of War to Babylon. How similar this seems, to Russia of the former Soviet Union attacking Crimea, then Ukraine; China's aggression toward Taiwan...

So Assyria's devastation was replaced by the domination of Babylon, replaced by invasion of Media, then everyone conquered by Alexander the Great and the Greeks. All the while, the exiled people of Judah were Prisoners of War, human chattel belonging to whomever won the battle.

What does it do to people, to their faith, to be in the path of war for more than a Century? According to a recent Brookings Institute Poll following America being involved in Wars for 24 years, 24% of Americans claim to be ready to take up weapons in political violence within their own communities!

While between 70% and 80% of Americans agree Elections need to be Free and Fair, that Voting Rights are at stake, that every Vote needs to be counted, that Citizens' rights need to be protected; 3 out of 4 Americans believe the future of Democracy in the United States is at stake, because we do not trust each other. Twenty-some years ago, I had a prophecy, that what the Terrorists wanted was for Americans to live in fear, to erode trust in one another and our institutions, until we were paralyzed.

In the midst of this kind of unrest, fear and turmoil, The Prophet Daniel had a Dream, a Vision.

In our dreams, things are not always as they appear. Carl Jung was a proponent that in dreams, the archetype of our fears can be seen symbolically.

In Daniel's Vision, Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar was replaced by a mythical King Belshazzar.

The invasion of Assyria became a winged Lion.

Conquering by the Babylonians a great Bear only intent on devouring flesh.

Persia & the Medes envisioned as a winged Leopard with 4 Heads/4 Kings sharing authority.

Then Alexander the Great and the Greek Army marched in wearing armor plating. There is reference to 10 horns, symbolic of the succession of Greek Kings.

What a frightening dream, as you are victim to one attacking beast after another. What an overwhelming reality, as Nations attacked one another to dominate and destroy. Yet, ironically, in the Book of Daniel and Esther, all those of Israel, Judah, Assyria, Babylon and Medes are ethnically considered Chaldeans! For the last 80 years our world has discussed a 2 State Solution for the Holy Lands; but increasingly it appears neither State respects the other as Human, as having rights, the enemy always being envisioned as the unprovoked aggressor who destroys everything.

Then a different dream invaded Daniel's Vision. Almighty GOD, sometimes represented as a Whisper, an Outstretched Arm, a Mighty Hand, an All-Seeing Eye, here is "The Ancient of Days", Eternal and all Knowing, seated on a Flaming Throne on Wheels! His hair and beard and robes all were white! When I was first Ordained at 26, I was presented with a Black Pulpit Gown, when I earned a Doctorate at 55, my robes and hair had become Grey, Coming to Green Valley I love the White Robes I was given but feel a little like Gandolf the White! The Throne of the Ancient of Days was surrounded by rivers of Fire. Thousands upon tens of thousands surrounded him, seated, attendant to GOD's Word.

When, according to Daniel of the Hebrew Bible, one "Like the Son of man" came with the Clouds of Heaven. He was given Authority, Glory and Power, where all Nations of every language worshipped him. His dominion will be everlasting, that will not pass away and his kingdom one that will never be destroyed.

This image of a Son of Man, is ancient among Judaism and Babylonian cultures. By the time of Jesus in the Roman Empire, cultural belief made the Son of man into a Messiah. But recall that MESSIAH did not refer to a Sacrifice. The Culture envisioned the Messiah as being a Great Warrior, who would overthrow the Roman Empire to restore Israel, just as the Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Greeks had all been destroyed. The difficulty is that a WARRIOR was not Jesus identity as MESSIAH, he came not to overthrow but to undercut, revealing the TRUTH and the Power of GOD.

In all four of the Gospels, Jesus never identifies himself as THE SON OF GOD. That is what Pilate and the Roman Centurian named him. NO, Jesus often made reference to The SON OF MAN. Older than Hebrew Culture, the archetype of the SON OF MAN is a Second ADAM. Where the first ADAM had been unable to love GOD more than his own desires for what he wanted, the 2<sup>nd</sup> ADAM, the SON OF MAN had already been proven, that nothing, no power, no height, no depth, not Kingdoms or Power or Wealth, not Beauty or the world's ugliness could ever separate the SON OF MAN from the love of GOD.

So from CREATION, to the Book of DANIEL, to 40 DAYS after the Resurrection, to us TODAY, time is irrelevant. The SON OF MAN is at the right hand of GOD ALMIGHTY, the Ancient of Days.