

Daniel 7:9-14 Two Pictures
November 21, 2021

One of the features of the genre of Apocalyptic literature is the use of fantastic images, not unlike the ones presented in recent action/adventure movies, like the Marvel series that is so popular lately. There are four beasts in the Book of Daniel, taken from the seventh chapter, from which today's reading was also taken, they are described as:

1- First, like a lion, but with the wings of an eagle, that could stand on two feet like a human being, and it had a human heart. It is unclear if a literal or metaphorical heart is meant.

2 - The second looked like a bear and it had three ribs in its mouth, signifying that it devoured what it had encountered.

3 - The third looked like a leopard, but with four wings on its back like a bird, and it had four heads.

4 - Finally, the fourth beast was not described in much detail except that it was different than the other three; it was terrifying and frightening, and very powerful. It destroyed everything with large iron teeth, and it had 10 horns.

The affect of these descriptions is similar to that of the modern day movies; on the one hand, it communicates terror, power, the use of destruction to bring fear and submission, and on the other, it reduces

that which we fear to a kind of costume-party clownishness.

Nowadays, people are not prone to take the fantastic literally. Even 2,500 years ago I suppose they would take images in a dream as just that, images in a dream. But in the modern world we are not devoid of horrific images; IED's, deadly viruses, and bombs that make mushroom clouds. In addition to a place of wonder and beauty, the world has always had its terrifying side.

There are two visions of life; one of a world of terrifying beasts devouring the innocent, and one beautiful, where grace and peace abound, and there is enough goodness and love, not to mention food and shelter; and they seem to be in contradiction. Are they? As the 23rd psalm puts it, "we walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death," and enjoy life's feasts in the presence of enemies. Perhaps the apocalyptic scenery is not so unrealistic after all.

The two pictures are both true, and present us in a position of having to live with one foot down here on earth, where sometimes bad things happen and in the end everyone dies, and the other in the heavens soaring on eagle's wings. In the movies there is always a hero to oppose the beasts, and bring victory over them. And that is what we find here in the Book of Daniel.

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man (a human being, and in the

gospels, the self-preferred title of Jesus), coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power. All peoples, nations, and people of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

We cannot escape the reality that much if not all of the bible was written by conquered peoples, living under conditions they did not choose and would not have chosen under any circumstances. The Book of Daniel is about a nation that has recently been destroyed. They were under the authority of others, and did not particularly appreciate it. To them, the powers that threatened them were like terrible beasts and that is how they presented them in the literature they left behind.

Perhaps our culture’s fascination with these fantasies about super heroes stems from the fear of being conquered like that, or maybe the sense that in some way we already have been conquered. The hero is a human being, not a beast, is powerful enough to defeat the foes and good enough not to be corrupted by the power, someone who will set up a good and just administration that will last forever.

Today is the Sunday before Thanksgiving, and it is also Stewardship Sunday. It has always been a part of our faith tradition to survey the gifts we have been given and be generous ourselves. Our gifts support

many purposes, not only the ongoing ministry of this church but also the work of others at home and around the world.

We do not give grudgingly, out of a sense of duty, as it were, or a part of some bargain in which the more we give the more we can expect to receive in return. Rather, we give generously as an acknowledgment of the generosity God.

Our giving is voluntary, stemming from our personal experience of being in relation to God. We are confident in God’s grace even when this world’s realities seem against us, and we are thankful because God has promised a secure foundation in the world to come.

The purpose of Apocalyptic literature is to comfort and encourage, and give patient endurance to those who await a better kingdom, an end to all that is bad. No such kingdom has ever happened and we have moved beyond kingdoms to democracies that don’t have kings, but the message is the same, the earthly powers we know, are not ultimately significant. We secretly desire and believe that God will make everything right in the end. In the meantime, we give thanks, and serve sacrificially, and pursue goodness patiently, and live not as residents in an earthly realm that is passing away, but as citizens of eternity.

Happy thanksgiving everyone, may God be with you all as you gather with family and friends as we begin this season of holy days.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)