

## **Look**

Revelation 1:4-8

November 22, 2015

Look! What do you see?

You see a choir loft, filled with choir members, and over their heads the gleaming pipes of our pipe organ and you see tables covered with soft black cushions for our bells and bell players, emblems of the importance of music to us, to our ears and to our hearts.

You see a wooden lectern and a wooden pulpit, emblems of the priority we put in our worship on hearing the word, the word of God, and on preaching the word, which means proclaiming God's word in fresh ways that speak to our lives and our circumstances as they are today.

But look again and you will see other emblems of our faith, too.

You see the chi rho: the Greek letter  $\chi$  which is our "ch" and the Greek letter  $\rho$  which is our "r," the first two letters of  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ , "Christ" in Greek, "Christ" which means anointed one, messiah, king. The chi rho symbol stands at the top, the head, of our church altar because Christ is the head, the head of the church, the head of our church, the head of all creation, the king over all kings, the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Jesus Christ is Lord! Not Pharaoh, not Caesar, not Adolph Hitler, not Vladimir Putin. Not Babylon, not Rome, not Russia or China or the United States of America. Not socialism, not democracy, not militarism, not money. Not any other human being or any other human institution. Not any other spiritual being or any other spiritual force. Not destiny, not fate, not fortune, not Satan. Jesus Christ is Lord!

You see the  $\alpha$  and  $\omega$ , the alpha and omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. (Where do you think the word "alphabet" comes from? The first two letters of the Greek alphabet:  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ .) He is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. Nothing comes before him, nothing comes after him. He is not Lord for a time, but Lord for all time.

You see the emblem on the face of the altar table:  $\text{I}\Sigma\text{X}\Sigma\text{NIKA}$  --  $\text{I}\Sigma$ , the first and last letters of  $\text{I}\epsilon\varsigma\chi\upsilon\varsigma$  (Jesus) and  $\text{X}\Sigma$ , the first and last letters of  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$  (Christ) and NIKA (like Nike!) a verb meaning to conquer, to win, to be victorious. So the emblem reads "Jesus Christ wins." Jesus wins. He is victorious. He prevails over every enemy. Glory and honor and power belong to him, forever and ever!

And you see, on either side of the face of the table, a grapevine with a cluster of hanging grapes and a wheat stalk, emblems of eucharist, of communion, of the wine and bread Jesus offers us. Jesus feeds us. Jesus nourishes us. Jesus provides for us, provides all we need, gives us himself.

But we are not finished. Look! What do you see? What is the focal point? What emblem stands at the center of all the rest?

You see the cross. Jesus Christ is king. Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus wins. But this is the way he wins. This is the way he rules.

He followed the path of obedience all the way to death, to his death on the cross. He let us do our worst to him. He let the powers of this world do their worst to him, mighty Rome and every other empire of which Rome is the model and just one more case in point. He let the powers of the air do their worst to him, the invisible spiritual powers infiltrating time and history and human souls seeding destruction and misery and death.

But there hanging from the cross, he won. It was not he who was defeated there, but Satan and all the powers of the air. It was not he who was humiliated there, but all the powers of this world who put him there. It was not he who died there, never to live again, but ... us? No! It was not us who died there! By his sacrificial death he has freed us from our sins. On the cross, Jesus defeated sin and death, for us.

But if the cross is a symbol of the worst we and all the powers of this world have done to Jesus, and if the cross is the place where the awful powers it represents are utterly defeated, why does it remain the focal point of our worship? Why not set it aside and replace it with a laurel wreath or a crown or a throne or at least an empty tomb? Because this is his way, this is God's way, and we need always to be reminded.

Because the world gets it wrong. Because almost everybody gets it wrong, so very wrong. They think might wins. They think money and power win. They think if you don't arm yourself and defend yourself and take it to the enemy you will lose. But they are wrong. That is not Christ's way and that is not the way of Christ's people, who are called Christians.

So cease and desist, Sarah Palin! Stop saying that Jesus would fight for the Second Amendment, that Jesus is a proponent of carrying, that "even the Lord said to take up arms and defend yourself and protect the innocent." That may be your way, but don't pretend it is the Lord's way.

And cease and desist, all you who say you would welcome only Christian refugees, or at least admit that you are speaking only as a frightened human being not as a Christian, because that is not the way of the Jesus who welcomed strangers and outcasts to his table.

And do not listen, Christian brothers and sisters, to the ones who bluster on about the need to utterly destroy ISIS, because that is not Jesus' way. That is not our way. Evil will not win. We know that evil will not win, but if we answer evil for evil we only serve its cause. Those who follow and love Jesus follow and love his way: "Do not overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good."

This is his way, the way of the cross, and when we follow Jesus, this is our way, the way of the cross. That's why it's there at the center of our worship, to remind us, because almost everybody thinks otherwise.

When you belong to Jesus, what do you need to defend? Nothing!

When you belong to Jesus, what do you have to lose? Nothing!

When you belong to Jesus, of what do you have to be afraid? Nothing!

Look! What do you see? Do you see him? Do you see him coming?

He is coming on the clouds and everyone will see him. All peoples on earth will see him. When they do, will they applaud him? Cheer for him? Shout his name? Cower in fear before him? No, they will mourn over him, because they will see the marks, because they will see that he is the one who was killed, they will see that he is the one whom they killed.

When he comes, it will be time for grief, time for grieving our ignorance, for grieving the futility of the ways of this world, for grieving our sin, for grieving the end of all we thought we were, all we pretended to be. But the end of what we were will be the beginning of what we shall be! Because the one who comes is alpha and omega, the beginning and the end ... the end and the beginning!

He is coming. He is coming soon.

Look ...

