

Seeing Beyond

Reflections on art and Christian faith

Last Judgment
Threads through Revelation - panel 12
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Textile, 2016
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Revelation. The Final Battle and the Last Judgment. A story of good vs. evil. But not like all the other good vs. evil stories, because this one carries the claim of being more than just a story, the claim that Revelation might somehow include more than just some generalised truths about good and evil. But does that mean we take it word for word? Like the banishment of the dragon shown here, for example? People keep speculating about these 1000 years, the millennium, of peace when the beast has been locked away and Jesus will rule. Is that now? Is it still to come? Will everything all happen at once? This is a carefully crafted book, after all, full of special numbers and symbols. So what does this particular bit mean?

I can't help feeling that this is all very academic. Does it really matter whether this era is now or still to come? I'm not convinced it adds much to my experience of life and death.

More than anything, this story and art seem to express a combination of human experience and longing. Experience, because we do face daily battles with the inner dragons of self-interest, self-criticism or resentment which take over our thoughts or actions, to the detriment of ourselves and others. Experience, because we're only too aware of the external beasts of injustice, greed and hunger for power which leave a trail of destruction across so many lives in the form of war, poverty and death.

And then the longing. Because, wouldn't we all love to have an angel or a cavalry of knights on white horses on our side, simply to chain these beasts up. For the bullies to be judged and condemned. And to know that our names and the names of those we love are written in the book of life. But in life that isn't how it works. The angels and cavalry don't always see our suffering or seem impotent in the face of it. Bullies too often get away with things and while we walk this earth we'll never know what judgment may come and on what side of it we'll stand.

I think the closest we get to the truth of God in this artwork is in that tiny little image in the top right hand corner of a loaf of bread and a cup of wine. Surely, as Christians, as followers of Jesus, we always have to come back to the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. That, after all, is where we claim to see truth, where we claim to see God. John spoke about a heavenly banquet. But the artist's choice of the last supper for the banquet reminds us of what is really laden on God's tables: not food, but the self-giving love on display in Jesus. The love which means that when we suffer in the midst of the battle, we can know Jesus, know God, at our side, suffering and struggling as we do. The love which in the resurrection outlasted and overcame death, and is what assures us of the ultimate victory of good over evil. The love which overflows with grace, mercy and goodness - and which, if we have faith in it, will stop us ever worrying about questions of judgment. Can anything really ever add to that?

Biblical References

The Last Judgement ([Revelation 19:9-20:15](#))

The Last Supper ([Matthew 26:17-30](#), [Mark 14:12-25](#), [Luke 22:7-23](#))

Jesus' resurrection ([Matthew 28:1-10](#), [Mark 16:1-13](#), [Luke 24:1-49](#), [John 20:1-21:14](#))