

Visions

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37; Psalm 93; 11-26-06

I am sure that most of us here this morning are familiar with Yogi Berra, the champion Yankee catcher. But along with being a very fine baseball player, he is also known for making some interesting comments, from time to time, about all of life. Things like, "It was impossible to get a conversation going; everybody was talking too much." Or, "If the fans don't come out to the ball park, you can't stop them." The same goes for people coming to church. Or, "If you come to a fork in the road, take it." Or, "If you don't know where you are going, you will wind up somewhere else." That one is pretty profound. Then there is the comment he made upon some observation of an event in life saying, "This is like *déjà vu*, all over again."

As we know, this comment is a little loopy, as many of his comments were, because "*déjà vu*" means "something is happening that has happened before." It is at least a little redundant to say that it is also happening "all over again." But this morning, as we consider our scripture readings from the Old and New Testament sections of our Bible, we might agree with Yogi, for the readings are interestingly similar, although penned years apart. They are "*déjà vu*, all over again."

The form of literature we are dealing with in the book of Daniel, as well as in The Revelation to John, is known as "apocalyptic," that type of writing that deals with the end times. We need to remember as we read and consider both, that each was written for a specific audience located in a specific time and place and, thus, needs to be referred to in its own historical setting. It is inaccurate, at least, to try to lift the visions out of either book and apply them to our own time frame.

Daniel is considered to be the first piece of apocalyptic literature in the Bible. One scholar notes, "The six stories and four dream-visions of the book Daniel make up the first great work of apocalyptic.... These apocalypses come from times of national or community tribulation, and are not actual history, but through symbols and signs are interpretations of current history with its background and predictions of a future where tribulations and sorrows will give way to triumph and peace."

The Book of Revelation is the second of these forms of literature in our Bible. This book was written to address things going on in the author's time, particularly the persecution of the early Christian church and its members. It, as Daniel, is based on a series of visions the author had as he struggled with and addressed difficult and perilous days. John had been exiled to the Island of Patmos and received these visions while there. Both books are full of symbols that we have no way of understanding. Neither was meant to scare the bejesus out of us in our present world setting. We have times and happenings of our own that can cause us to have our own set of visions and predictions of what is to come. Some people are kept very busy trying to judge the signs and portents of our days and nights to have them make sense. As in all times in history, our time truly is "The best of times and the worst of times."

Once again, as did those folks in the age of the author of Daniel and in the age of the author of the Book of Revelation, we will find ways to get through the fine mess we are in. Because, you see, both books were written not as scriptures to reveal the end of all life, but as scriptures to give hope. They both point the way to peace following a time of

great struggle. When read with this fact in mind they can bring us great confidence in the future if we choose to live the lives God has called us to live.

A revelation (small “r”) can come to us through an other-worldly form as in the case of our two Biblical books or it can come to us through another person or event. Sometimes the best revelations are not complete in them selves but are those which open a door in our minds and hearts and that help us come to a decision that makes life better in the present and in the future.

In our reading from the Gospel of John, Jesus was facing his own end. Pilate was questioning him and not getting the answers he desired so that he could expedite the problem that was Jesus. In this section of the gospel Jesus tells Pilate and the rest of us that his kingdom is not of this world. In other places in the gospels he indicates that the kingdom is within us or among us. We need only discover it. So, is this a different tack for him?

I would like to suggest that he might have meant that the kingdom could not be of a world that is in the condition his world was and ours is. Perhaps the message he was handing to us was the same message others gave to Daniel and John. The kingdom would come to a world that was receptive to it, to a place that is responsive to the gospel of love. When the hearts and minds and souls of humans undergo a shift, the kingdom of God will be able to enter in. This is an optimistic view of what the world could be. Some may say that we can never reach this ideal and so they never bother to practice the gospel of love. Others try and give up because they feel as if they are taken advantage of for extending love and caring that is never returned. But there are those persistent few who keep moving through life loving others and never expecting love in return, they go on never counting the cost. Perhaps, these folks have received a true revelation, a glimpse of God and God’s kingdom. Perhaps, they have heard and integrated the truth of the gospel that Pilate tried to pry from his prisoner.

We are fast approaching the season of Advent—the time of waiting, once again, for the appearance of Christ. Many scriptures in this coming time frame point to the second coming, an event that is cataclysmic and sometimes threatening; an event that echoes our readings from Daniel and from Revelation. It can be a time of “*déjà vu*, all over again.” But it can be different. It can be a season of softening, a season of opening up once again to the Love that “came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, Love divine. Love was born at Christmas the stars and angels gave the sign. Love shall be our token, Love shall be yours and love be mine, Love to God and to all men, Love for plea and gift and sign.” (Christina Rosetti)

Perhaps this year, the second coming will truly be the entrance of Christ into our hearts and minds and souls, an entrance that will endure for a lifetime. Perhaps, it will be the entrance which underlies the visions of Daniel and the author of Revelation; an entrance of a new way of seeing and doing life that will bring about the kingdom in a world made new again. Amen