

## Sermon: 2021/06/06 (2nd Sunday after Pentecost, Year B) - 1 Samuel 8:4-20, 11:14-15; Psalm 138; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; & Mark 3:20-35\_BTR

Kids' Talk: None. (Baptism of Kellen Feno.)

### The Millennium

So much controversy and intrigue, fascination and conspiracy "swirls" around just *one* book of the Bible:

I'm speaking - you've probably guessed - of *Revelation*.

(The final entry in the inspired Canon.)

It *seems* like ancient science-fiction;

the Christian man's *Game of Thrones* (without the pornography).

There are dragons and multi-headed beasts;

both superheroes, *and* supervillains.

- who is the one with 'the mark of the Beast', for instance?

Who is the one who manipulates and 'deceives the nations'? [Rev. 20:3]

A sort of Lex Luthor character.

Perhaps it's Jeff Bezos?

The recently divorced Bill Gates?

Or maybe Pope Francis?

I'm being silly, of course.

But it is astonishing what a simple Google search "throws up."

Almost quite literally vomits nonsense onto your computer's desktop.

And so, what I want to do today, is to..."clear some space"; some *mental* space - to suggest at least a *partial* interpretation of a letter to seven ancient churches, which rife with contextually-contingent metaphor.

Specifically - *narrowly*, I hope to "shed some light" on the sole matter of the "Millennium."

In fact, really it is *Jesus* who will assist us - my focus, this morning, is the gospel reading, and what He has to say there is *really* Good News for us. [Pause.]

*Revelation* describes something of a cycle of "ups" and "downs."

"Highs" and "lows."

And by doing so it continues - or perhaps, *recapitulates* - a pattern which is visible *throughout* the (holy) Scriptures, which are, *if nothing else* - but actually much more besides(!), a record of a great deal of human history.

And we see this "cycle" reflected, *demonstrated* in this nation and in other nations.

We see how, without exception, they suffer periods of turbulence and revolution; of contraction *and* expansion.

Sometimes the cycle moves *very* quickly indeed - like in (the Book of) *Judges*: peace and stability are fleeting, and frequently interrupted by disturbing outbursts of violence and poverty and confusion.

Sometimes, though, the intervals are drawn out and, mercifully, dull, and there's opportunity to indulge a little in God's 'very good' [Gen, 1:31] creation - America, largely, more so than others maybe, has "flattened" this "cycle," prosperity just appears to lead to more and more of the same.

Yet, all good things - that is to say, *man-made* "things - come, eventually, to end of course.

This is certainly one lesson we - in the West - don't like to hear but confronts us both in the Book, is evident from experience, and emerges unambiguously in history-class.

But it is not *obvious* - *one*, whether the "cycle" in *Revelation* is a short one, describing events that take place in rapid-succession, or, *two*, over a longer duration.

Nor is it *obvious* if John - the author - was speaking (a) of events already underway, (b) about to commence, or (c) far in the future - and I've said already that basically *everything* is disputed, and I'm not about to solve it today conclusively for everyone.

My suggestion is a tentative one, though I offer it in the hope you might share it with me...

I mention the "cycle" of "ups" and "downs" (in *Revelation*) because whilst it seems *depressingly* inevitable and inescapable - *certainly* I see it at work in my personal life - I have had some dark "chapters" and some really great ones - there are "seasons" where I feel like I'm taking (great) "leaps" forward in becoming more like the Savior, and then a sin or a temptation "slams" me down again; but the "cycle" is suddenly *and marvellously* described as being interrupted for *all* of humanity in chapter twenty.

John tells us: 'I saw an angel coming down from Heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.

He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan,

and bound him for a thousand years,

and threw him into the pit, and locked and sealed it over him...' [v.1-3a]

But the excitement doesn't end there:

He goes on to add that, having done so, for those who worship Jesus rather than 'the beast', they are then able to "*reign*" at this time, and from 'thrones' (he says), and that they are 'blessed': [v.4-6].

Multiple theories exist, then, about the 'thousand years' of Satan's chaining, but the one I prefer is this:

that John was speaking hyperbolically *and in reference* to the time of Christianity. That time which in his day - he was an Apostle of Jesus, so at the end of the first century AD - was just only beginning.

It stretched out before him.

And he could only glimpse and imagine what it would look like.

- when the Gospel would go out into 'all the world' [Acts 22:15], and evangelists - like his friends Saints Paul and Peter - would plant the "mustard seeds" that Jesus had promised: [Mt. 13:31f.].

What would those "seeds" become?

"Mighty oaks" - the denominations we see now.

But how could this be "The Millennium"?

Surely not, right.

What about the rise of atheism?

Or at least agnosticism.

What about bonkers postmodernism and so on.

Well, those are interesting, worthy questions.

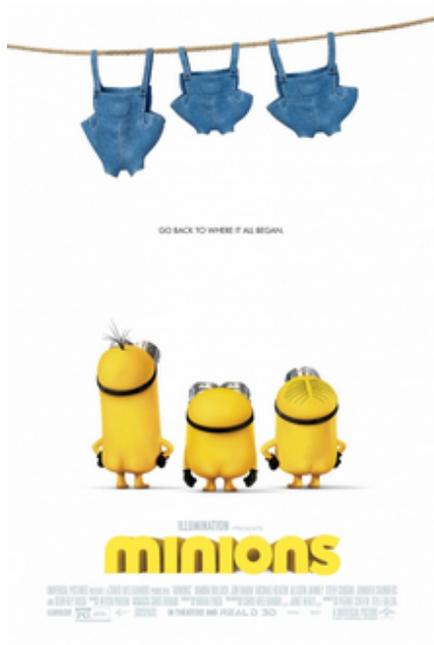
But, in response - *and in spite of the obvious objections*, I point you to the encounter and conversation, this morning, between Jesus and 'the scribes who came down from Jerusalem': [Mk. 3:22ff.]

Those guys, then, are agents of the Sadducees - the ruling priestly aristocrats of which Nicodemus was a member, who we heard from last week.

And they've been sent to interrogate the Lord, and, basically, "dig up some dirt" if they can, to discredit Him.

They are, in other words, these 'scribes' - a disarmingly neutral word, actually *lackeys* - I love that word: there's nothing really like it: flunkey, maybe. Or *minion* - yes! That's it.

The 'scribes' were *minions*:



But they didn't have yellow skin.

And they weren't adorable or comedic.

And their names weren't Kevin, Stuart, or Bob.

They were "slimy," sinister busy-bodies.

And they had no interest in *actually* discovering if Jesus was the Messiah, though that's how they would have described their mission:

they had already decided resolutely against Him and were looking to "de-rail" His ministry.

It's only if we accept that this was the case - that they were stubbornly convinced they already *knew* Jesus was a fraud - that they dismiss the exorcisms and miracles which should have proved otherwise.

They were like the blind wiseman who grabs-a-hold of an elephant's trunk and insists and insists that it *is* a python - a snake - and won't be told otherwise because "it is *their* truth."

Anyway, those 'scribes' accused Jesus of deriving His life-changing *supernatural* power from 'Beelzebub' - a demon.

And what does He say?

Calmly, without losing His temper - though they patently deserved it - He explained: "'...no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property *without first tying up the strong man.*"'

His point was a simple one.

"No."

"No, I'm not working for the Devil, because he wouldn't want me stealing from Him the way that I am."

What was Jesus "stealing"?!

*Souls.*

Jesus was rescuing souls for the Kingdom of Heaven.

He was releasing people like us from addiction and illness and self-destructive behaviors *and Hell*.

He could only do this because the one who had rightly claimed those sinners - so, the Devil, the 'ruler' of sinners [Mk. 3:22], was, *in some way*, restrained.

Or, to use John's word from *Revelation*, 'bound': [Rev. 20:2].

Now you see where I am going:

Friends, we are in a "season" that the Church calls Pentecost.

It is also known as 'Ordinary Time'.

But there's nothing "ordinary" about it:

Since Jesus rose from the dead, ascended and released the Holy Spirit to His followers, amazing things *can* happen.

We can, by *His* power, "bind" Satan; "bind" sin; "bind" ignorance or racism or ideology or selfishness or gluttony or lust.

I think Jesus in *Mark* and John in *Revelation* were both talking about *us* - about the time on earth of there being *disciples*.

About how in you and me the Kingdom does draw near.

And so this is the 'thousand years' or "blessing" - our thrones aren't physical, but they're spiritual and moral *if we dare sit in them*.

Amen.