

Easter 5C - Cycling Through

May 15, 2022

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Acts 13:44-52, Psalm 145, Revelation 19:1-9, John 13:31-35

It's been a long week at Heritage High School, where the "Where the women are strong, the men are good looking, and all the children are above average."

350 or so seniors walked across the stage Friday night, some of them making it despite their best efforts, and rain was avoided, tears were shed, smiles brightened and diplomas awarded. The yearly in-and-out of seeing students come through the door, learn, and move towards the next steps of their life reaches the end of the cycle. We bat clean-up in the summer school, but by and large we now wait, in some peace, for the next round of students. And the cycle starts again.

But something else happened this week... I got into a fight with some students. Not a real one, mind you, but a fight over something very important. Something key to these kids education. They resisted. They think I've lost my mind. They think I'm wrong. I am not. I am right. I am always right, and it's important for them to know that I'm right. Now some of you might say, "Isaac, they're 11th graders, what could they possibly be saying that would start an argument with a grown adult?" This group of know-it-all 11th graders were trying to tell me that Rise of Skywalker was a bad star wars movie! The nerve! The gall!

Because I love that movie. Lots of people don't, but they don't have good taste; at least these two 11th graders don't!

For those of you haven't, and I'm quite willing to pause for 2.5 hours for us to watch it together... it's the end. The heroes of the original movies, Han, Luke, Leia, are all out of the picture. It's down to Rey, the new Jedi, and her friends across the galaxy to break the cycle... the cycle of light and dark, of dominance and submission, of tyranny and democracy, and life and death. Of redemption and resurrection.

We don't get to preach on Revelation that often in our lectionary, so I'm going to lean into this one a bit. Between pop cultural Christianity and a general preoccupation with knowing the future, Revelation inspires a kind of quasi-gnostic fascination from some readers. We try to decipher what appears to be complex code and prophecy... using our ever reliable news media, trying to find point to point relationship between individual events and things and people within the text and the individual events and things and people within our own times. So we get interpretations that wire together various conspiracy theories about the papacy or the European Union or Israel or vaccines or whatever anxiety is at the high water mark.

Instead, the letter... and remember, it's a letter... is a series of cycles, of a Christ-opposing, systemic corruption that enters into government and commerce, of the martyrdom and suffering of those who follow Christ rather than the corruption, and the vindication of the victims at the judgment of the Lord.

And the cycle repeats. Over and over and over, until the final vindication and final victory over Satan at the culmination of all things, which is what our reading references this morning.

The cyclic nature of the reading challenges us because we tend to not think in cycles. We read the passages and we think "A" to "B" to "C"... this happens, then this happens, and this happens. But this is a pattern that exists throughout the Bible, and it shouldn't surprise us that St. John uses this pattern to give hope and strength to persecuted lovers of God.

But we still struggle with the cyclic pattern... Why doesn't God end it? Why doesn't God intervene in human affairs once and for all? When will Jesus vindicate His people?

To answer this I think we need to spend a moment thinking about what God is... And what God isn't. For us, we experience time in a straight line... This happens, then this happens because of this first thing, then this happens because of the second thing. I get in my car, I forget to get gas, I run out of gas. But God exists outside of time, outside of our experience of thing after event after thing after event. For God, it isn't impossible to exist in these cycles simultaneously to our eyes.

What these means is that when God intervenes at Calvary, when Jesus rises from the grave, when God delivers God's people at the Red Sea, when Jesus returns to bring final vindication to his people... They are all the same event, experienced differently in our linear timeline, but for God, all events culminate in God's intervention into His creation.

But this also means that the celebration of the Wedding Feast... is also taking place, spiritually simultaneously to our experience here on earth; and here we are, at the table. No longer waiting. Our vindication is complete, the systemic evil defeated, and now we are called to the Supper of the Lamb in a restored creation, where ordinary wine and ordinary bread are the body and blood of Christ... a kind of double-sided existence that is both here and still in waiting from our point of view.

To be in this liminal space, of both existing inside of time and inside of the spiritual reality of the Creation as baptized believers, means seeing the world through the eyes of God, where we celebrate the defeat of evil, a cycle that is broken, once for all at the waters of the Red Sea, at the giving of the Law at Sinai, at the cross of Calvary, and in an empty tomb.

Amen.