

“Dominion Forever and Ever”
Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-29
Easter 2: God Rules the Present Creation

John 20:19-29

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

Revelation 1:4-8

⁴John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace

from him who is and who was and who is to come,
and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,
⁵and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness,
the firstborn of the dead,
and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood,
⁶and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father,
to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

⁷Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him, even those who pierced him;
and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be.
Amen.

⁸“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God,
“who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”

Prayer

Creator of the stars of night;
God of all living, God of all loving,
God of the seedling, the snow, and the sun;
Hope of the world, God’s gift from highest heaven;
Ruler of all nature,
Ruler of the nations, Son of God and Son of Man;

Holy, holy, holy One;

Alpha and Omega,
who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty;

My Lord, and my God:

Today we celebrate your present and eternal dominion.

We see your dominion
in the daunting scale of the universe,
the recognition that we mortal, living organisms on earth
are not built to the scale of the cosmos;
we are time-limited, and more or less bound to a tiny, round rock
orbiting a small star in one of hundreds of billions of galaxies.

We feel your dominion
as we live with our senses on this planet,
standing on the soil, breathing the air, drinking the water;
smelling the change of seasons,
tasting the flavors of the world,
hearing wind and waterfalls and children and music.

We hear your dominion
in your demand, your command, your insistence that
regardless of our political opinions, economic conveniences,
or social circumstances,
we are responsible for looking after all your children,
feeding the hungry, rescuing the abused,
caring about the troubled and wounded
no matter where or in what condition we find them.

We celebrate your dominion this Easter morning
as once again your lordship over life and death
and everything in between
gets us out of bed and into another new day,
assuring us that nothing in life or in death

can separate us from your love in Christ Jesus.
Amen.

The Sermon

How do you find your bearings in this world?

I know a guy who couldn't bring himself to vote for either of the major party candidates in the last election, but he didn't believe in *not* voting, so he dutifully went and cast his vote for somebody else in whom he also had no confidence. In his opinion, Obama was, literally, the worst president in U.S. history, and he is genuinely baffled whenever anyone disagrees with that assessment.

I know somebody who dearly misses George W. Bush being president, and I know someone else who can't believe George W. Bush was *ever* president.

For each of the last, let's say, seven presidents going back to Carter, I can name and happily picture in my mind a good, smart, faithful, humane person who respects, admires, even adores that president,

and a good, smart, faithful, humane person who believes that the same presidency was a catastrophe of cynical corruption, moral bankruptcy or indefensible weakness.

It is clear by now that we are not about to find our bearings in some great national (let alone global) consensus that's right around the corner.

There's not going to be any report issued that everybody's going to read and then we'll finally all be in agreement.

That's partly because we humans share a predilection for interpreting what we read, hear or see however we want to, which is almost always

in a way that fits our preconceived narrative of what's good, and right, and real—and what isn't.

Which brings up another reason why broad consensus does not seem to be just over the horizon. Namely, that our time is marked by the endangerment of an idea: the idea that there is a qualitative difference between facts and falsehood.

I would even say our time is not only *marked* by the endangerment of that idea; I could imagine it may one day be *defined* by it.

Climate change, vaccines, evolution—these things become politicized, and all of a sudden people start talking about hard science like it's either all theoretical, or it's some vast conspiracy.

Come on. If you don't like the conclusions of the science, it's perfectly good, and right, and moral, to present more data and more analysis, and prove your hypothesis.

It is *not* good or right to accuse scientific observers of lying, just because you don't like the implications of their findings.

Jesus said, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). That would indicate to me that truth and life are important to God, if Jesus is the ultimate exemplar of each.

If that's the case, then Christians should be all about pursuing the truth, no matter where we are *afraid* it may lead, because ultimately, according to the gospel, it leads to Christ.

But often, it seems like we are all Pilate now: stumbling through our mystified interrogation of Jesus; and when Jesus says, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world: to testify to the truth," all we can offer in response is to look at him in bafflement and ask, "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38).

How do you get your bearings in this world?

There have always been invented stories, particularly ones that demonize other groups of people. What's new is the massive scale at which they can now be instantaneously and intentionally propagated.

There have always been leaders who use lying as a political and even personal strategy.

Rulers and governments have always used falsehoods and deception both to intimidate their own populations and to wage war, hot or cold, against their border rivals and their global adversaries.

Religions springing from every corner of the earth have always made unprovable claims that fly in the face of observation and science.

But the damage that can be done to humankind and the earth itself by the unchecked, unexamined propagation of disputable, inhumane beliefs is magnified exponentially by both the tools and the weapons at our disposal.

What even is truth anymore? And if we can't even answer that question, how in the world are we supposed to be able to find our bearings?

Thomas walked into the room, and all of his starry-eyed comrades, who had been huddled in fear when he went out, were now saying, "We have seen the Lord!"

He could be forgiven if his first thought had been, "That's nice. How about next we see a psychiatrist?"

But I don't hear defiance when Thomas tells the others that he's not there yet in terms of believing what they are saying to him.

I hear him responsibly, objectively, dispassionately telling the truth. He's not talking doubting Jesus or doubting anything about Jesus; he's talking about himself when he says: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

He's not saying "I refuse to believe;" he's saying, "Look, if I don't see his wounds for myself, it's just not going to happen."

Thomas needed to know the truth.

And at the moment, there is a lack of tangible evidence and, for that matter, now that he thinks about it, it seems like there's plenty of evidence to the contrary when the others are suggesting that Jesus has overcome the power of death itself.

That's not what it looked like the other day, at the place called The Skull, and there's just as much greed and fear and hatred out there now as there was before we watched him go to the cross.

How do we get our bearings?

Maybe Thomas's issue is that, like all of us to some extent, he doesn't fully see that this is already God's world.

Maybe Thomas is us, quite understandably not yet recognizing that God already has absolute dominion.

God is already everywhere and in everything.

But if we aren't seeing the world as God's dominion, we're looking at it through an entirely different and inadequate and misleading lens.

It makes us think that some things that look like the last word are the last word, and in God's universe, no human construct is the final word, including the cross.

If we could see the world through the lens of sensing God's presence everywhere, at all times, in everything, maybe Thomas would not have been burdened with this not entirely fair reputation as a "doubter."

God is not waiting for a future time in which to enact divine lordship, and is not absent from us, so there is no need for us to wait for God to "return," and in the meantime, just suffer through the miseries of this life.

Even now, the powerful machinations of the human-constructed world of social, political and economic systems are only visitors on God's world of soil and in God's greater cosmos.

What would it look like to live in a world where we were always conscious of God's dominion?

I think we get glimpses of it.

I was treated to one, years ago, and it wasn't out in nature, communing with the trees. I was in a pool hall with a bunch of guys the night before one of them was going to get married. Late in the evening, the proprietor called out that it was closing time. The groom-to-be and another guy were just about to finish their game, so the guy in charge said, "OK, finish up."

At that point some guys at another pool table started playing again, and the manager kind of said, "Guys, I'm closing. I'm just letting these other guys finish up their game."

One of the men at the other table then berated the manager, and that led to one of our guys reprimanding that guy for talking to the proprietor like that.

The tension was all over the building and it felt like there was going to be trouble at any second.

Finally, our guys finished their game, and everybody started to file out of the building.

The tough guys at the other table made it out first, and I seriously wondered if there was going to be trouble waiting for us in the parking lot; I knew that some of the people I was with didn't mind mixing it up, either, and I didn't want anything to do with that.

Around that time, I realized that based on the way our cars were parked, I was going to have to walk right past these tough guys.

So, peacemaker that I am, I figured that as I passed the guy, I would just say a very simple, "Good night."

The rest of my group was back a little bit behind me.

Got right up where I had to walk right in front of him, and as I passed, I said, "Good night."

Then there was this great moment where at first he thought I was yanking his chain, and then all of a sudden he realized I was being serious, so he kind of went, sarcastically, like he wanted a fight, "Oh, yeah—'*good night*'."

But then he saw the genuine look on my face and he kind of went, "Oh... uh... goodnight!"

Then from all over the parking lot you could hear all of their guys and all of our guys very pleasantly exchanging “Goodnight! Goodnight.”

How do you get your bearings in this world full of people just looking for a fight, where truth is elastic and it’s harder than ever to know what you can believe?

Today I celebrate what we can *believe in*: that God has dominion over all of it—the human interactions; the planet on which we live; the infinite ocean of the cosmos:

The one who is and who was and who is to come,
Jesus Christ, the faithful witness,
firstborn of the dead, ruler of the kings of the earth;
who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood.
To him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Look! He is coming with the clouds;
every eye will see him, even those who pierced him.

So it is to be. Amen.

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