

Donald J. Trump will begin his term as president at noon, January 20<sup>th</sup>. Have you been planning for what will happen January 21<sup>st</sup>? Have you been making lists, getting everything ready, rehearsing what you will do for the day after the inauguration? Probably not. I haven't either. I don't think a lot will change with our new president. It isn't really about him. I'm cynical about what elected officials can do in general. The people who hold the reins of power—the people who are massively wealthy, who can write the checks—won't let too much change, unless it is to their own benefit. Things will probably keep going on like they have for a long time. I am not expecting any massive changes.

What about Christ's kingdom? Is our attitude the same there as well? Our festival today is somewhat like Jesus's inauguration as the Christ. Jesus's baptism marks the beginning of his great words and deeds that are recorded in the Gospels. Immediately after his baptism Jesus was very busy. He was tempted by the devil, swamped by sick and demon possessed people, teaching in the synagogues, doing one miracle after another. Things looked like they were changing for the better, but then Jesus was arrested, crucified and died. That was when the cynicism began in earnest. Folks had wondered whether Jesus might have been the Christ, but he couldn't have been since he died.

That was the end of the road for the vast number of people who had once believed in Jesus. At one point there had been many thousands who were interested in Jesus being made king by force, but any hope of that was gone when everyone could see him hanging dead on the cross.

Even after Easter the picture didn't improve very much as far as the disciples were concerned. John chapter 21 seems to indicate that the disciples went back to their old livelihood of fishing. Acts chapter 1 tells us that the number of believers in Jerusalem was only about 120. That is a far cry from many thousands. Even with the great day of Pentecost, when 3,000 repented and were baptized—that was less than the feeding of the 5,000, or the feeding of the 4,000.

Cynicism is a way to protect yourself from being disappointed. Cynicism is when you don't get your hopes up. Having your hopes dashed is painful. The higher the hopes, the more intense the desire, the worse the pain. To prevent getting hurt you can check yourself out. Things will stay the same. Why bother? Just go gentle into that good night.

This is a way to insulate yourself from pain. Disappointments will not hit you as sharply. But there is a terrible cost. With cynicism things will, at best, stay the same, but more likely get worse. If you won't get involved, if you won't change your ways, if you won't hope for change, then nothing is going to change. It is forfeiting to the powers that be.

This defeatist attitude is disastrous in all areas of life, but it is especially devastating for faith in Christ's kingdom. If we would not have hope in Christ, then we are left with how things are. Paul calls these the elementary principles of this world, to which we are enslaved. We are enslaved to the devil. We are enslaved to our desires. We are enslaved to pursuing mere self-interest. Our chains have been put on by ourselves, which are our fears and insecurities, our dread of pain and suffering.

How differently the bible speaks about Christ's kingdom! Paul says: **"For freedom Christ has set you free!"** The Gospels speak of Christ **"proclaiming liberty to the prisoners!"** And indeed, Jesus set people

free from all kinds of disabilities and ailments in the Gospels. The people loved that! We slaves love to get a little taste of freedom. But a lot of people thought that that kind of thing was over and done with when Jesus died, and even when he rose. The risen and ascended Christ remains at work in his kingdom, but a lot of people would like it better if he would do those old sorts of things that helped people along in their pursuit of their own self-interest.

But here is what we should realize: the work of Christ in his kingdom is not less after his death and resurrection, it is more. The work of Christ with his death and his resurrection, the baptism with which he baptizes, and the body and blood that he distributes is more. It's deeper. It gets to the root. The root is evil itself, and Jesus reverses it. The seemingly invincible powers of sin, death, profit, power, and all the rest are not invincible. Jesus promises a reckoning for the powers that be who so often oppress and steal and murder and seemingly get away with it. They will be burned with an unquenchable fire. Everything will be turned upside down. The first will be last and the last will be first. John baptized with water; Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Whatever hopes we might have about Christ's kingdom, they are inevitably inadequate. You want to be healed of an ailment, a defect, old age, and so on. You want to be the man that you should be. You want to be the woman that you should be. **"For freedom Christ has set you free!"** These things and more are yours. If they are not already fixed somewhat in this life by the healing work of the Holy Spirit, then they will be completely fixed by the resurrection. The goodness of the resurrection is more than we can imagine. Paul says, **"No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the imagination of the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love him."** Even if you try to imagine what Jesus's kingdom will be like, you're going to fall short. What comes to pass will be greater.

Cynicism, therefore, is incompatible with Christianity. Cynicism is managing your hopes so that you won't get hurt when they inevitably don't come to pass. If you are managing your hopes for Christ's kingdom, you are simply being an unbeliever. If you believe that Jesus can't or won't help you, then you are an unbeliever.

Unbelief is by no means uncommon, even among those who would like to consider themselves to be Jesus's disciples. We see that all the time in the Bible. We see that in particular with the Gospels' accounts of the resurrection. Even the closest of Jesus's disciples lost their faith when Jesus died, and they were slow to believe after the resurrection. They were flesh and blood, just like us, with all our hiccups and insecurities. However, we cannot let our doubts and insecurities interfere with what is plainly testified. Jesus's kingdom is glorious, even if we lack the faith to believe.

Jesus's kingdom is glorious among us. Let us not doubt that either. Whenever anyone comes to believe that the seemingly invincible powers are not invincible because Jesus is greater—that is a miracle worked by the Holy Spirit. Whenever anyone remains in the faith—that is an ongoing miracle of the Holy Spirit. These believers will one day be caught up together with the Lord in the clouds for an adventure that is too great for words to describe.

It does not please me, therefore, when I hear something that is quite common among us. It is quite common for people to comment on how large or small a gathering is—and usually it is how much

smaller the gathering is these days. This strikes me as largely missing the point. It would like the people in Jesus's day who could have scoffed at the smaller number who gathered after the resurrection. I could imagine that some of them must have said: "Do you remember how many people there were at the feeding of the five thousand or the four thousand? The attendance these days is greatly reduced."

Christ's kingdom is not about crowds or impressing those who have the ability to count. Christ's kingdom is about setting people free and changing hearts and minds. This is always an individual affair. Each individual either remains enslaved in their unbelief or they are set free through faith in Jesus. Whenever a sinner repents, the angels rejoice, and we should too. The kingdom of God remains at work. It is glorious, but the glory is only apparent to those who have the eyes to see and the ears to hear.

So as we consider the inauguration, so to speak, of Christ's kingdom with Jesus's baptism, we should cast away cynical thoughts. Cynicism is not very attractive or useful in general, but it is particularly inappropriate when it comes to Christ's kingdom. Our problem is not that we have too low of thoughts and hopes and dreams. Our problem is that we do not think as grandly as we must if we are beginning to understand Christ's kingdom. We are too earthly minded.

Therefore, I'd like to close with a passage that speaks to this. In Colossians chapter three Paul says: "If you have been raised with Christ, then seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

When Christ appears, you will appear with him in glory. That is more than enough for anyone who is hungry for that which is good.

