

The Kingdom of Heaven Came Near

This weekend marks the 75th anniversary of the liberation of **Auschwitz**.

It is a time for us to reflect on the darkness out of which we are coming.

“those who lived in a land of deep darkness; on them light has shined.”

The darkness is of our own making, and lest we think we are different than the good people of the Village of Auschwitz, whom General Eisenhower paraded through the camp so they'd be forced to recognize their complicity with evil, we should remember **Manzanar**.

This darkness that is being rolled back is the gloom of the reign of Death. And it is only being lifted because of the coming of Christ, the Government of God of Life, to whom death is entirely foreign, totally unrelated. For Jesus Death is not an obstacle.

Our obsession with freedom combines with the fear of Death to produce violence stoked and justified by myths and lies about the “other.” This darkness is our inability to see the truth because we have acted based on the lie. And it can only be lifted or pierced by our admission of complicity, our reconciliation with the Other whom we have vilified and victimized.

We would prefer the approach of power and control that we see in the rivalry between John the Baptist and Herod. In today's part of the story it is the foreshadowing of the Baptist's beheading that begins Jesus' ministry, but in a very different direction, not in the grip of Death.

Subsistence farming characterizes the economy of Jesus' Galilee and Samaria. Peter and Andrew are wading out into the inland sea casting their nets for any fish that may be near enough to shore. Jesus overturns their world view by calling them to an altogether different kind of economy. The shape the fear of Death takes in such a society is scarcity. and competition. If we don't find enough we will die. “Fishing for people” is a political economic development of abundance. It's sharing.

The sons of Zebedee and their father in their boat mending their nets represent middle-class or ownership stage of economic subsistence. One where the family business represents the hope of advancement, where the fear of Death is hidden beneath socio-cultural-religious mores and norms of filial piety. To get up and leave their father holding the net, so to speak, is more than a youthful whim. They overthrow the entire internal economic edifice that religion and culture built up over generations of families to sustain a traditional negotiation on the rule of Death.

Jesus announces the lifting of the reign of Death and calls his hearers to extricate themselves from the harness of Death and the culture and religion of Death that enslaves us. The economy of Heaven “has come near.” As it is in heaven, so it is now on earth. A friend of mine came up to me recently asking to talk and said, “God came to me and asked me if I would forgive the man who raped me.” I replied, “What do you think? Do you want to? What would it cost you?” The Kingdom of Heaven had come near, but it was her choice to respond, to act, to choose.

When the reign of God comes near, our enemies can become our friends. We recognize our complicity with the blockage, the log jam-that is keeping us enslaved to a system built to hold back Death at any cost.

I want to conclude by returning to Manzanar, to the Japanese American concentration camps in WWII. I just learned story of Ralph Lazo a 16 year old son of a widowed house painter who was so outraged when his friends at his mixed race high school in downtown LA were forced after Pearl Harbor to sell their homes and pack up their belongings and moved to relocation camps that he boarded the train to Manzanar with them and became the only non spouse non-Japanese to voluntarily suffer with them. The kingdom of heaven came near to him.