

I am not sure whether we are intended to find this evening's readings reassuring or disturbing!

Certainly an interesting essay could be written comparing and contrasting the two against each other, and another that compares and contrasts them with other scriptures, because one thing is certain, neither of them represents the whole story!

G K Chesterton wrote this about fairy tales Though I would like to say that I'm not putting Revelation or Joel into the category of fairy tale but I think you might agree when you've heard it, that the purpose of their kind of holy literature is similar:

"Fairy tales, then, are not responsible for producing in children fear, or any of the shapes of fear; fairy tales do not give the child the idea of the evil or the ugly; that is in the child already, because it is in the world already. Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon".

Or as it is often paraphrased: ***"Fairy tales do not tell children that dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children that dragons can be killed."***

I hope that we can hope in the great promises of a land of milk and sweet wine and flowing water where all evil and bad things have been purged without having to buy into the literalism of the blood spilling that is described.

I have just a few examples to explain why I think that we can claim that hope.

The first is using the parallel of a parable which you may have already discovered are stories that you can only unpick so far. Let us take one we had two weeks ago at this service of the wheat and the weeds. The farmer planted good seed and then the enemy came along and planted weeds in between. The farmer told his servants not to pull up the weeds before it was time to harvest the wheat in case the juvenile wheat was pulled up as well. Of course in the world of crops, the weeds could not become wheat. In the realm of Christian belief, any wrongdoer can repent and receive forgiveness.

The second relates to the imagery in both passages and described in Revelation as ***'the great winepress of the wrath of God'*** and yet, we are much more familiar with the verses (also from John) of Jesus saying ***'I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.'*** Indeed they are the motto verses for our Junior and Infant Academies.

And finally, a verse which we heard last week at 10 am as part of the Christ the King readings. Unlike the battle imagery that we heard from Joel, John tells us that Jesus answered Pilate with the words ***'My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But, as it is, my kingdom is not from here'***. I'm not aware that I've ever considered this verse before. Jesus is not a king with an army, battle imagery is probably not appropriate when talking about Christians or perhaps about the way that the bad things of this world will be ended (and are we really talking about actual people or perhaps rather the greed, abuse of power, poverty, hunger that lead people away from acting with love for their neighbour).

Our Christian story is first that it is God who will defeat the dragons we have known about since we had an imagination, and second that we are to be both tellers of and actors in that story. Advent is as good a time as any, I would suggest, to brush up our lines :)