

Lent, Day 16  
Saturday, March 23, 2019

Revelation 8:6–13

I remember being shocked, in my naivety, that it took William Wilberforce twenty years of political machinations to see black slavery abolished in England. When he began to petition for it the response was that the British empire could not afford to abolish it. The economy had been built on slave labour. As a result the system couldn't allow human beings their freedom.

This is the same sort of thinking that we find in the book of Exodus as well. Egypt had become a strong empire with a huge slave labour force of Israelites. When Moses came and asked Pharaoh to allow the Israelite people to go into the wilderness in order to worship her God, the answer was, "no!" Enter the ten plagues of Egypt. This was God showing his power to Pharaoh in order to convince him to let Israel go. It took death to finally make it happen, and even then Pharaoh changed his mind and tried to recapture the Israelites.

I begin my reflection here because we are all involved in whole systems of sin and we are completely unaware of it. In fact, we would feel threatened—that our lives were being threatened—if we were asked to give those systems up. That's why a short form of the plagues are being exercised in this passage of Revelation. This is a description of a new exodus on a world-scale. This is not God being angry and destroying one third of things. This is God cutting out the cancer that we don't want to admit is there. We'd rather a bandaid and a kiss on the head. But, for those who suffer under the system of sin, which is really all of us, they need real deliverance. We need the system to end. That is the assurance to which these symbols point.

As we prepare in the season of lent what will happen on the global scale will happen to us on a personal level. Sin and systems of sin don't just live out there in the world. They live in our own selves. Part of the work of the Spirit of God is to search us and reveal the strongholds of sin in us so that we may give them up. God desires to deliver the true us which means putting to death the false self.

Prayer

Spirit of God search us, know us, and make us known. Help us to endure the painful work of purification so that we may have the joy of holiness in us. Amen.