

Lent, Day 4  
Saturday, March 9, 2019

Revelation 2:8–11

It is important to note right off the bat that John is not being anti-semitic or anti-Judaic. John himself and the movement he represents is thoroughly Jewish. He preaches that the promises of Israel's God to his people has finally been fulfilled in and by his Jewish Messiah. However, the reality is that although this is his gospel not all of his Jewish kinsmen agreed or believed this to be true. In addition to churches made up of both Jews and Gentiles, there were synagogues in Smyrna of Jews who rejected the message of Jesus.

When John calls them a synagogue of Satan he is not being derogatory. As if he is reduced to name calling of those who dare disagree with him. Rather, he is being descriptive. The Satan means literally, "the accuser." The local synagogue has began accusing the church to the local political authorities. It is through this accusation that the church has become poor in a rich area and why they are being persecuted through imprisonment. The call to the church is for them to not fear this persecution. It will not last forever, ten days John says which is symbolic language possible a day equaling a year.

The call on the church is to overcome or conquer faithfully even if that leads to death. Jesus himself is the first and the last, who was dead and is now alive. The promise is that even if they are to die Jesus will meet them on the other side and bring them to new life. If they don't fear the first death of the body, then they will not need to fear the second death, the total destruction of the whole person.

Perhaps most notable is that this church does not have an area for correction. This is a faithful or righteous church. Their persecution is undeserved in that light (politically they are heralding a king other than Caesar). Yet, their devotion to Jesus fosters attack, imprisonment, and, possibly, even death.

For us in the season of Lent this passage reminds us that entering into the wilderness means encountering Satan. It is through the encounter with Satan that our faith is tested and refined. It is a painful process but it is also part of God's process of maturing our faith into its fulness. In short, everyone who wishes to benefit from the cross and resurrection of Jesus will meet their enemy on that road. However, we do not need to fear him but keep following Jesus who enable us to overcome whether we live or we die. Thereby, we will receive the crown of life.

Prayer

Lord, it is hard not to fear death. Especially a death that we don't deserve because our only guilt is loving you. However, we cannot control the powers of this world, but we can determine to live faithfully even to death, trusting you will raise us to new life. Amen.