

Within the last couple of years, after listening to a lot of hype, especially from my son, I decided I should watch Guardians of the Galaxy. For the same reason I decided I should watch Deadpool.

They're not typically my kind of movie. I didn't make it through Deadpool. But I thought Guardians of the Galaxy was pretty good.

Then last year I went to see Black Panther. Imagine my surprise when I discovered they're all part of the same world. And not only that but that world included The Avengers, Captain American and Iron Man...and Spider Man for gosh sakes! Turns out there are 43 Marvel movies and they're all interconnected. No wonder I struggle to make sense of these movies – with each one I only catch a glimpse of the overall story.

I also saw Wonder Woman and just a couple weeks ago Joker. They're DC comic movies. There are 72 of them, also I think interconnected. But don't quote me.

Each of these movies only gives a glimpse of this whole world that exists underneath and beyond it.

Who knew?

That's kind of what our readings for today do – they give us a glimpse into a world that exists underneath and beyond what we can see.

Let's start with Daniel. Chapter 7 of Daniel is an example of an apocalypse. Parts of Daniel, some small segments of the gospels and the entire book of Revelation are all apocalyptic writings.

We usually think of the word apocalypse as meaning destruction...annihilation...the violent end of the world.

But in the Bible that's not what it means at all. It means Revelation. An apocalypse is a divine revelation...it reveals something about God and God's work. Apocalyptic writing pulls back the veil between heaven and earth and shows us a world that exists beneath and beyond what we can see.

Apocalypse has taken on a very scary meaning for us, largely because of what many believe is a terrible misunderstanding of the book of Revelation.

But apocalyptic writing really is meant to give hope in a situation where there seems to be none. It's not really primarily a prediction about the future either. Rather it describes what's really real...in the here and now, regardless of what it looks like.

So back to Daniel.

From the time the people of Judah returned from exile in 538 BC they were not independent. They were ruled by one superpower after another. At the time this part of Daniel was written, it would have been the Greek Empire.

The succession of Greek dynasties were always resented, but it seems that for a while at least, the Greeks allowed Judah to maintain its own religion and claim God's law as their own.

Then a ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes arose. He placed a statue of Zeus in the Temple in Jerusalem and turned it in to a shrine for the Greek god. He considered himself a god and he persecuted the Jewish people.

It is into that situation Daniel's vision is shared. The vision describes 4 terrible beasts arising out of the waters of chaos.

The four beasts represent four kings ruling over Judah, one after another. The part that was left out of our reading today describes the four beasts in great detail. Here's a description of the fourth beast:

"It's terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth and was devouring, breaking in pieces, and stamping what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that preceded it, and it had ten horns. <sup>8</sup>I was considering the horns, when another horn appeared, a little one coming up among them; to make room for it, three of the earlier horns were plucked up by the roots. There were eyes like human eyes in this horn, and a mouth speaking arrogantly."

This fourth beast likely represents Antiochus. But it also bears a striking similarity to one of the beasts in Revelation which probably represents the Emperor Nero. The reality is that the beasts represent all rulers who rule in a way that harms God's people.

When a people is under a ruler like that, it is the only reality they can see. It appears that the ruler has all the power and they have none. It appears that each day will be the same grind under a cruel and oppressive rule that the day before was...and no change appears to be in sight.

But Daniel's vision tells them that this is not the ultimate reality. The ultimate reality is that all kingdoms belong to God. Underneath and beyond what they can see, there is a different reality...a reality where God rules and their suffering comes to an end...that's a hopeful reality.

Daniel's vision lifts the veil between heaven and earth and shows God's victory over death and evil.

A good vision for this All Saints Sunday.

So what about Jesus' message from Luke's gospel? How does that fit?

It's not apocalyptic writing but it too reveals a reality we may not be able to see.

When we look at the world around us we tend to peg people as winners and losers. The winners seem to be the ones who are wealthy and powerful...the ones whom people look up to...people who are sometimes even worshiped.

But woe to them says Jesus. Instead, the blessed are the poor, the downtrodden, the ones full of sorrow.

Underneath and beyond the reality we see, the ones who look like winners learn that real blessing comes when one has no course of action left but to trust God.

On this All Saints Sunday, we pull back the veil between heaven and earth. We see that there is a whole world underneath and beyond what we can see.

And in that world, oppressive rulers are brought down. In that world the hungry are fed and the wealthy and powerful know true blessing, not the blessing that comes from their own hands.

In the world we can see, we look at ourselves and all too often see our faults...our shortcomings. We look at others and see their faults and shortcomings.

But in the world Jesus reveals to us, we who have been claimed by Jesus are in fact saints...not because we're perfect, but because Jesus made us saints in his death and resurrection.

And when someone we love dies, it looks like the end. But beneath and beyond what we can see is a world where death is no more.

In that world, there lives a whole host of saints who have gone before us. When we gather for communion, our eyes will tell us that we are just with the people in this room.

But beneath and beyond what we can see, the saints we have loved gather around the table with us. For that matter, the saints we've not loved so much gather with us, too because in the world beneath and beyond what we can see, relationships are healed and love rules.

Ultimately, that's what our scripture readings are about. It's what this day is about. It's about love. It's about a world beneath and beyond the hatred and cruelty we can see. It's about eternal life that extends beneath and beyond the death we see.

And although it's complete revelation lies in the future, it is here now. So today we lift the veil and get a glimpse of a whole other world... a world beneath and beyond what our eyes can see.