

## With the Eyes of Your Hearts Enlightened

Derby Street is only a block long. Even experienced taxi drivers can have a hard time finding it among the warren of roads that make up that part of Edinburgh, Scotland. If you tell the driver it's just off Stanley Road, not far from New Haven Harbor, he'll nod and say, "Oh, Aye," and take you at breakneck speed over roads designed to handle horse-drawn carriages and handcarts.

In the middle of Derby Street is Number 15, the house where my wife Andra grew up. It's a "terraced house" -- what Americans call a "row house," built in Queen Victoria's day for a now-forgotten member of the rising middle class. A merchant of some kind, perhaps, or maybe a lawyer. Someone with enough income to avoid the tenements around the corner, but not rich enough to live in the New Town.

Jean Walker has lived almost all her married life at 15 Derby Street. She and her husband Ian raised their son and daughter there. There she graded her students' English essays and knitted innumerable mittens, scarves, cardigans and pullovers. Not so long ago, multiple skeins of knitting wool could be found in every nook and cranny of 15 Derby Street.

Jean doesn't live at number 15 anymore. She's 94 years old, and resides in a "care home." "Assisted living," we'd say. The house on Derby Street had been empty for more than a year when Andra and I spent a few days there last June. Hamish, the gardener, still drops by to keep the garden going, but the time has come to put number 15 on the market.

If Jean had her druthers, she'd still be resident at 15 Derby Street, but her health no longer permits that. Until recently, she still talked of going back. As a result, the house itself was in a state of suspended animation the last time I saw it -- Jean's bed still made, her dishes still in the cupboard, her kettle still on the drain board, her knitting needles still nestled on a table in the room where she used to grade papers and concoct the most amazing works of woolen art.

Sorting through some papers stashed away in Jean's bedroom, Andra found a stack of letters. One of them was addressed to "Jean on her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday." It had been written by Jean herself in the year 1939, when Jean was sixteen years old. At one point in the letter, Jean writes, "I'll be right back. I just have to go round the house and pull down the black-out curtains."

At the dawn of what would prove to be a long world war, not knowing if she would survive Hitler's bombs or a German invasion, a sixteen-year-old lassie sits in a darkened house in Dundee, and writes to her twenty-one-year-old self, pouring out her fears, her dreams, and her yearnings for a future she cannot see, but dares to hope for.

"Christ the King," or if you prefer, "The Reign of Christ" is a peculiar event in the liturgical calendar. We speak of it as the "last Sunday in the church year," but it's really not about ending a yearly cycle. It's about a future that reaches far beyond what one hymn calls "the circling years." Unlike liturgical time, Biblical time is not circular. It's linear. On Christ the King, we dare to contemplate not the end of one year, but the culmination of all the years.

What will that future hold? What will we see when we pull up the black-out curtains and meet King Jesus?

Will we meet the shepherd king of Ezekiel's vision? According to the prophet, the sheep of Israel have gotten mixed up amongst the sheep of other nations on "**a day of clouds and thick darkness**" – a sure reference to the Yom Adonai, the great Day of the Lord, the day dreaded by the unrighteous but welcomed by the faithful.

Ezekiel's king is the good shepherd whose echo we hear in John's Gospel, and Psalms 23 and 100, the shepherd who knows his sheep, who seeks the lost, who binds up the injured, who makes them lie down in green pastures and leads them beside still waters.

Remember those sheep you made in Sunday School with fluffy cotton ball-bodies and popsicle-stick legs? They fit nicely in the first part of this passage, but then the passage takes a sharp turn, and Ezekiel's good shepherd gets down to business. No fluffy cotton-ball sheep now. Now the shepherd king is the uncompromising judge of the sheep.

The fat sheep have been butting the weaker sheep aside, pushing with flank and shoulder, hogging the good places at the watering hole, fowling the water so that the others cannot drink.

Their days are numbered, says the prophet.

*Take notice, you bullies on the schoolyard and you bullies at meetings of world leaders. Watch out, you thugs who steal lunch money, and you politicians who shove your colleagues aside to pose for the photo op. Your comeuppance is imminent.*

**I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.**

At the head of the reorganized flock, says the Lord, **“I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them; he shall feed them and be their shepherd.”**

And what shall the shepherd king feed the flock? *Justice*. Justice for the downtrodden. Justice for the mistreated. Justice for the fat sheep who seize advantage over the weak.

Ezekiel’s vision is good news for some, but bad news for others. Combine Ezekiel 34 with that parable of final judgment we just heard in Matthew 25, and you end up with some sheep who are surprised to find themselves welcomed into the fold and other sheep who turn out to be goats in sheep’s clothing.

By welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the imprisoned, the unaware righteous of **all the nations** discover that they have been ministering all along to the same **Son of Man** who now calls them to account. The judge who sits on **“the throne of his glory”** is also somehow present in **“the least of these.”**

Such is the unexpected telemetry of Christ the King Sunday. It arks both forward and backward. We strain to catch some glimpse of God’s future and find ourselves looking at the present through the future’s lens.

The future that lies just beyond the horizon is, at the same time, the present that stares us in the face. The Son of Man, the judge of all the nations, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the great Shepherd of the Sheep, summons us to look heavenward. And at the same time, he calls us to look around. The signs of his dawning kingdom are everywhere, if only you and I had eyes to see.

Of course, it’s easy to be distracted by other signs. Bing Crosby is already crooning over the p.a. system at Walgreen’s, wishing you a White Christmas, and yesterday your neighbors erected that plywood nativity scene in their front yard – the one with the white-skinned Mary and the Christ child illumined by a 40-watt bulb.

It takes a little imagination to enact the liturgy of Christ the King while the culture is rushing forward toward its Hallmark-greeting-card version of Christmas.

But isn't it always like that for us Christians? Aren't we always living in two time zones at the same time? We live by the culture's calendar, with its own set of sacred seasons: football, basketball, baseball, and its own high holy days: Labor Day Sales Weekend, Super Bowl Sunday, Black Friday, Cyber Monday.

And at the same time, we live by another calendar – one that begins with Advent and ends – if “ends” is the right word – with Christ the King. Sometimes the two calendars intersect – or at least they appear to intersect. Most often, however, they clash without our admitting it. For, as we all know, the culture has little patience for Advent, no patience for Lent, and no concept whatsoever of Eastertide.

We live, you and I, with one foot in the present and the other in the eschaton – in the kingdom arrived and the kingdom yet to ripen, in the already and the not yet. Aware of the kingdom all round us, we nevertheless pray, “thy kingdom come on earth . . . as in heaven.”

To live in both time zones – the eschatological and the cultural – requires a different set of eyes. Writing to us through the church in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul comes up with just what we need:

**I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe . . .**

That's it. That's what we need to live in both time zones. We need “**the eyes of our hearts enlightened.**” Through the eyes of our hearts, we see the Son of Man in the least of these. Through the eyes of our hearts, we perceive the signs of the Kingdom dawning all around us. Through the eyes of our hearts, enlightened by the Spirit, we glimpse both *the already* and the *not yet*.

Like a sixteen-year-old girl who has just pulled down the black-out curtains and is penning a letter to her future self, we center our present selves in a future we cannot see clearly, but picture with the eyes of faith, the eyes of our hearts.

Soon and very soon we are going to see the King. Alleluia.