

Security officers arrived on full alert when someone spotted an undetonated bomb in a residential garden. However when officers got there what they discovered was not a bomb but, “a particularly large zucchini.”¹ In all fairness, the 81 year-old German who spotted the squash lives in a neighborhood where unexploded wartime bombs are regularly found. It just makes the point more clear: *our vision is shaped by our stories*. The man saw a bomb because he lived through a war, and the remains of that war still litter his landscape today. Whatever we see when we look at the world has a lot to do with the stories that shape our vision.

And maybe now more than ever millions of us feel like our vision of the world is up for grabs. In the midst of ongoing violence at home & abroad, in the midst of assault charges against powerful men in every station of life, in the midst of political rhetoric that runs hotter & hotter every day but never seems to fix anything; in the midst of it all, maybe now more than ever our vision of the world is desperate for reliable stories that sustain us. That's what our scripture readings offer.

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of Christ of King, we're invited to let our vision be sustained & shaped by the story of Jesus resurrected & victorious over evil & death. We're invited to let our vision be sustained & shaped by the story of God's love for the world. Because **each of our readings are meant for people whose world vision is either under assault or up for grabs.**

¹ <https://apnews.com/bd29bab57b4d4aedb3cc3d95bd99ff75>

In *Ezekiel*, God's people have been violently conquered and exiled to a foreign land. Their vision of the world — and of God — has been shattered by invading armies who destroyed their land, their temple, and their lives. In the midst of it all, a lone voice — the prophet — speaks to the people and tells them a story to sustain them & to shape their vision of God & the world.

It's a story about God's love for God's people. It's a story about God in the 1st person. "Thus says the Lord GOD: *I myself* will search for my sheep and will seek them out," (Ezek. 34:11). By my count the prophet uses a 1st person pronoun for God 20 times in this short passage. God says: I will search, I will rescue, I will bring, I will gather, I will feed, I will make lie down, I will bind up, I will strengthen, I will destroy, I will judge, I will save, I will set up, I will be their God. It's dizzying — because the prophet is reforming their vision with **a story about God as their personal shepherd.**² In the midst of the world's ongoing violence & suffering the prophet invites God's people to see a story of God's personal and rescuing love. That's Ezekiel.

In the *Gospel*, Jesus offers a parable about sheep & goats that's also meant to shape our vision. It's a story about learning to see others — especially the downtrodden & suffering — as the living presence of Jesus himself. And just like our OT reading, it's a story told in the 1st person. "I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed

² It's a First Person version of the same story we hear today in Psalm 95.

me,” (Matt. 25:35). By my count Jesus uses a 1st person noun or pronoun 15 times. *Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me* (25:40). In a world of injustice & suffering Jesus is inviting us to see that we love & serve God by caring for the “least” in our midst. **If Ezekiel is about God’s responsibility for us, the Gospel is about our responsibility for Jesus in our midst.** If Ezekiel is about God’s loving care, the Gospel is about our loving response.

Today on the Feast of Christ of King, we’re invited to see a story of God’s loving care and our loving response. It’s a vision that’s deeply rooted in Christian faith. It’s a vision that grows out of baptism: *Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?* The question is, *how?* How do we do it when it seems like our vision of the world is constantly under assault or up for grabs? How do we allow our vision to be shaped by the Christian story of God’s loving care and our loving response? Here’s how:

First, *Gathered worship. A regular practice of gathered worship is the key to Christian vision. Our congregation will always have a diverse range of thoughts, beliefs, and opinions. Good! But our Christian vision is fundamentally shaped by our gathered worship of the God we find in Jesus. First: gathered worship.

Second, *Repetition. Christian vision is formed through repetition. It’s easy to idealize moments of isolated transcendence, however Christian formation follows a pattern that we find in almost every other area of life: we grow through repetition. That’s how our Christian vision is formed.

If our vision of the world is ever going to be formed by the story of God's loving care & our loving response, then it's only going to happen by our repeated practice of gathered worship. And here's the exciting thing. The more we commit ourselves to the repeated practice of gathered worship, the more we begin to resemble the Body of Christ for the world. You see, the church never exists for itself. We always exist for the sake of the world. So every time we gather for worship we're allowing our vision to be (re)formed by the Christian story of God's loving care and our loving response. Or as we hear in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, we're allowing the "eyes of our heart" to be enlightened by God's wisdom and revelation (1:15-23).

Today, as we celebrate the victory of Jesus over the ongoing violence, assault, and empty rhetoric of our world, we're invited to have the eyes of our hearts opened (again) by our *repeated* practice of *gathered* worship. And we're reminded by our Readings that Christian faith is most believable, most transformative, and most life-giving when invite God to enlighten our hearts with God's own love for the world. *Amen.*