

Living in Two Worlds.

Like it, or not, we live in two worlds.

On the one hand, as baptized Christians, we live partly in the unfolding kingdom of God here on earth.

We find ourselves in that world when we are in communion with one another.

We find ourselves in that world when we share what we have, when we reach out to the least, the lost, and the left behind.

We find ourselves in that world when we are worshiping.

Or when we have the great privilege of sitting next to someone as they take their last breath.

Or when we are guiding our youngsters — or comforting our elders.

That world is filled with peace and serenity and joy.

But we also live in a world that is broken and corrupt.

It's the world of people being shot at for driving up the wrong driveway.

It's the world of gun manufacturers profiting off of the mass slaying of school children.

It's the world of arms manufacturers ginning up wars wherever they can for the sake of profit.

And we are called, as Christians, to live in both of these worlds.

The 23rd Psalm says so quite plainly when it speaks of us sitting down in the midst of our enemies.

That is the human condition.

That is the Christian condition.

And how are we to manage this life lived in these two worlds?

Peter tells us to expect suffering if we are faithful to the gospel.

If we are faithful to the gospel, we can and must object to the rampant orgy of gun violence.

If we are faithful to the gospel, we can and must object to the economic system that places profits over people as the disparity between rich and poor reaches beyond obscene levels.

If we are faithful to the gospel, we can and must be active in the public square; seeking equity, fairness and justice for all people.

That's what it is to live within the "Gate" that is Jesus.

These are the values that Jesus preaches.

These are the evils that Jesus condemns.

And just as Jesus faced the consequences of daring to speak against the injustice of his day, injustice born out of and nurtured by what Saint Paul calls "the powers and principalities of this world," so we too must be prepared to suffer the consequences as we too are called to speak up and speak out.

Speaking up and speaking out is at the core of our responsibilities as Christians.

Yet know this.

We don't stand alone when we confront the powers and principalities.

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu said on many occasions in the early days of the anti-apartheid movement:

"I am a bishop in the Church of God.

I am 51 years old, yet I don't have a vote.

An 18 year old, through the wonder of biological irrelevance — white skin — is able to vote...

They can remove Desmond Tutu.

They can end the South African Council of Churches.

But the Church of God goes on.

The government must know that the Church is not frightened of any earthly power.

More are for us than can ever be against us.

For we are joined with angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven!

A vast throng no one could ever count, from every nation and every tribe, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in

white and bearing palms in their hands, shout together: 'Victory to our God!'" Living Church, 185, no.16, p 6 10/17/82, modified.

People active in the civil rights movement experienced this life lived in two worlds as they spoke up and spoke out against segregation and all of its evil cousins.

Some may remember Easter Sunday in 1964 when nonviolent protesters were confronted by police dogs and fire hoses in Birmingham, Alabama.

In charge was police chief Bull Connor, an unapologetic racist.

Andrew Young recalls that:

"Wyatt Walker and I were leading the march.

I can't say we knew what to do.

I know I didn't want to turn the march around.....

I asked the people to get down on their knees and pray....

Suddenly, Rev. Charles Billups, one of the most faithful and fearless leaders of the old Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights jumps up and hollers:

'The Lord is with this movement!

Off your knees!

We're going on!'

A stunned Bull Connor yells: 'Stop 'em! 'Stop 'em!,' but none of the police move a muscle.

Even the police dogs that had been growling and straining at their leashes stand perfectly still....

I see one fireman, tears in his eyes, the hose just drops to his feet.

Our people walk right through those red fire trucks, singing:

'I Want Jesus To Walk With Me.'

The police refuse to arrest us.

The firemen refuse to hose us.

The dogs refuse to bite us.

It was quite a moment to witness.

I'll never forget the old woman shouting out as we march through the barricades:

'Great God almighty done parted the Red Sea one more time!'
Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden*, 223, modified.

The transforming power of God is also alive at Dr. King's 1963 speech at the Washington Monument, where, to Mrs. King,

"it seemed that the words Martin spoke came from some higher place — a gift given to the weary people before him.

Yes, heaven itself opened up that day and we were all transformed.'" P. Lehman, *The Transfiguration of Politics*, 182-3.

When the Sandinistas overthrew the vicious Somoza regime in the late 1970's Fernando Cardinal was one of the resistance fighters who came to power.

Not long after, he came face to face with the man who had tortured him mercilessly when Cardinal was a prisoner of the Somoza regime.

Cardinal approached the trembling torturer, saying: "Now I will have my revenge on you!

Now you will pay for your crimes!"

Cardinal went up to the torturer; and embraced him, saying:

"This is my revenge: I forgive you."

We live our lives in two worlds.

The thieves and robbers Jesus refers to are those who try to put God's stamp of approval on greed or war or economic systems that reward the few at the expense of the many.

And Jesus says:

"Stop it!

Listen and see that the way to life follows only one path.

There is only one Gate.

There is only one Way.

It's this:

Get over yourself.

Give up controlling people, places and things."

For when we do, a whole new world opens before our eyes.

That new world surrounds us all the time, but we're blind to it if we stay wrapped up in ourselves.

It's the world as God created it to be — a world in which we are all One; with each other, and yes, with God.

Today we are confronted with the starkest of choices.

As political and racial divisions rear their ugly heads, shall it be the forces of hate and blame that prevail?

Or shall the gentle breeze of compassion, solidarity and hope seize the day?

Now more than ever we are called to renew our love of the gentle, yet ferocious Messiah, whose voice we know.

To trust the path he invites us to walk.

Forgive one another!

Let go!

And at the same time, speak up for the just cause!

Speak out for the vulnerable and the outcast!

Stand with Jesus as he always and everywhere stands with the outsider, the outcast.

Throughout this life, we are constantly walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

Throughout this life, we are on occasion blessed to find ourselves in the company of fellow travelers with whom, like the early apostles, we can share what we have – as we trudge this road of happy destiny.

Throughout this life, we are called to listen to the voice of the one who is the Gate.

Who is the Good Shepherd.

Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

+amen

