

ADVENT WEEK FOUR

December 24, 2019

A Loving Heir: Advent as Revolution

Hebrews 1:1-4

*In these last days, G*d spoke to us by a son, who was appointed heir of all things and through whom [G*d] created the ages... Hebrews 1:2*

In 1831, French diplomat Alexis de Tocqueville traveled America and saw promise in its inheritance laws. Deviating from pro-aristocratic customs where eldest sons inherited everything, Tocqueville believed this distribution of power and property likened every father's death to a mini-revolution. Tocqueville believed an ethos of equality permeated America's nascent democratic experiment, promising, over time, to deliver America from the malaise of chattel slavery, Native American removal, restrictive patriarchy, and enshrined racism. Despite injustice, he envisioned an alternative future.

Today's passage addresses a similar hope from another time of social and political volatility. Imagine Jewish followers of Christ, long-dispersed by war, exile and empire, listening to Hebrews amidst a corrupt and increasingly xenophobic Rome that compelled "patriotism" and silence by violence and social exclusion. For this auditor, Hebrews' portrait of a loving first-born heir subverts imperial cultures of domination.

Instead of exploiting privilege, this heir relished relationship, embraced diminished status, and self-sacrificed in order to distribute power and privilege. Less a supersessionist rant, for this auditor Hebrews is an affirmation and memorial to G*d's fidelity and love: solace for a tenuous time. Hebrews 1:1-4 exhorts the people of G*d to envision Christ's radical love as an advent of divine revolution.

In these last days [of Advent], may we hearken to Christ's powerful, life-sustaining utterances, which personify love and transform practices. As we, too, witness injustice in our "democratic" institutions, may we let G*d's distributed love [power] combat the encroaching paralysis and corruption of hopelessness and frustration. May Christ's impending advent and revolution fortify our connectedness with those ancestors with whom G*d spoke and that great cloud of witnesses who foreshadows our hope. May it fortify our connectedness with that heir, our sibling, who speaks with life-giving, transformative love.

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