

A Tale of Two Cities (with apologies to Charles Dickens)

Two French cities have gained notoriety far beyond their mere existence. They have become entwined into the fabric of our lives to the point that we use their names to describe the familiar. Their names have weight and content for us all. Those cities are Bayonne and Nimes France.

Bayonne is on the north coast border with Spain and just up river from the ocean. It became a strategic post in many conflicts and was held variously by the Spanish, English and French. It was there that a new form of defense came about. With the development of gun powder and muskets it was seen as useful to have a barrage of musket fire but the reload and priming process was too slow to follow up with continuous fire. So the tactic was to fire the musket and then slide a spear down the barrel to fight hand to hand until there was time to take the spear out and reload. At Bayonne it was figured out how to attach a blade or sword to the muzzle of the musket without interfering with the fire arm capability. This fast became known as the Bayonet. To this very day everyone knows what a bayonet is.

Nimes, France (pronounced "Neem") is an industrial city that is known for textiles. They wanted to start producing what they called a "Serge" material that wasn't nearly as stiff as canvas but still heavy and useful as protection. Their trial products fell short of their desires but was thought very useful by those who did not know what the original goal was. Soon orders for the "Fabric de Nimes" or that is the "cloth of Nimes" started coming in. It became fashionable to drop the "Fabric de Nimes" and just call it "de Nimes." After a while it was just denim. Today everyone knows what denim is and it is a part of the fabric of our lives.

Two cities that are seemingly entwined forever in our vocabulary and have become a familiar presence in our lives. But our focus here is on the things of God. Two words given us by God are Christ and Church. Say "God" and everyone immediately thinks of their own imagined being doing what they imagine God would do. Say "Christ" or "Church" and there are as many interpretations of those words as there are people being spoken to. Everybody knows "God" and everybody in twenty first century America knows "Christ" and "Church." But there is no clear definition and everyone is just as likely to think something totally untrue or outrageous as they are in thinking the truth. Everyone wants God in their image and are willing to create a new denomination of belief to support their thoughts. Why?

Christ Himself was confronted by the same confusion during His Own ministry. In Luke 17:20-23 we see Christ dealing with this;

20) Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed;

21) nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."

22) And He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.

23) "They will say to you, 'Look there!' Look here!' Do not go away, and do not run after them."

The Pharisees then are like most people now, looking for a weapon that may be brought to bear against them or, better yet, to take up and wield in control of other people. They wanted a bayonet. Where's the edicts? Where's the enforcements? How do we know where we are on the honor roll? Is there an honor roll? Where's the test of fellowship? Do they hate their sinful neighbors as much as I do? Does just any old kook get to come in? Hey! What's gong on here? All of Christ's preaching of love for God and love for their fellow man went right over their heads then and it still does now.

Christ did fulfil His ministry. He did establish the Church. The Church is Christ's Body. It is His Bride. The Church is the kingdom of God. The resurrection to eternal life is the resurrection of the Church. The Church is in the midst of the world. Just as denim is a comfortable presence for those who wear it and is seen as desirable, so too is the Church in the world. Christ could have commanded solemn oaths be taken. He could have demanded pledges be recited, salutes given or anthems be sung. But He gave us a meal to share. His yoke is easy and His burden light.

Many have tried to make the Lord's Supper into a bayonet to threaten people with by withholding it or going by a list of who is worthy to take it. Many view it as a tool by which a clergy can render salvation to, or withhold it from, those seeking absolution. Some have decided to only let the laity eat the bread but withhold giving the fruit of the vine. Others substitute water for the juice. Still others see no reason to even bother with it as they think it is a weapon to be put aside as undesirable for common activity. To them it is not a part of their fabric of life in Christ or any thoughts they have. It is bayonet and not denim.

Christ Himself instituted this action. As Luke 22:19,20 records:

19) And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "this is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

20) And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."

I hope and pray that this is a comfortable and needed part of your lives and it becomes so for everyone's life. We need the fabric of our lives to be that which Christ gave us for residency in His Kingdom. Just as we are clothed in Christ when we enter into Him and His Kingdom so now do we fellowship with Him by His command, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

In Christ,
DeMilt Morse