

Audacious visions (Revelation 1:4b-8)

Harriet Tubman's visions seemed, to her, to be glimpses of glory.

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As a child, Harriet Tubman was regularly beaten by the people to whom she was hired. One time, she was struck in the head with a heavy metal weight, which led to a lifetime of debilitating headaches and seizures. It also led to what doctors might call hallucinations, but Tubman understood them as visions. She was a devout Christian, and to her the visions that she experienced as a result of that head injury were from God. To her mind, God would reveal things to her while she was dreaming or in the midst of a seizure. Ever the rebel and free soul, she rejected the New Testament teachings that slaves should be obedient to their masters. She didn't belong to any human being; she belonged to God.

When Tubman made her first escape from her plantation in Dorchester, Maryland, she described what it felt like to realize she had crossed the Mason-Dixon line and was now in free Pennsylvania: "I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven."

"Glory over everything." Tubman had a way of describing her experiences that truly crossed over into homily. Her visions seemed, to her, to be glimpses of glory. And given what she was able to accomplish, I'm inclined to agree with her that they indeed were. But what's more amazing to me is how she was able to sift through the death-dealing hermeneutics of her masters and come to believe that God wanted far

better for her than they did.

It takes a lot of not only trust but audacity to see something that seemingly betrays your lived reality. John's account of his eschatological vision is addressed to a community of disciples under siege. Nero's repression was brutal. Their communities were scattered. But the vision of Jesus coming in the clouds to claim his kingdom and the citizens of his reign is subversive to the empire and oppressing power. Jesus is the beginning and the end. Jesus is the one who was, is, and is to come. At no time does God relinquish God's claim over God's people, despite what despots say or do. That's pretty badass!

Reign of Christ Sunday invites us to do what Harriet Tubman did: claim the ultimate authority over our lives for ourselves. This important church observance beckons us to shed the death-dealing hermeneutics of our own respective "masters," to reject despotic notions of power, and to embrace a national and global vision that is decidedly more hopeful, loving, and just. Glory over everything.