

Revelation 21:1-6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

***“See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them and be their God;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.”***

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.

John 13:31-35

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

I've been listening to a lot of Rage Against The Machine recently. If you aren't familiar with Rage, they are a heavy metal band that formed in the nineties. Their sound is raucous and unruly, and their lead singer, Zack de la Rocha's lyrics are at turns angry and prophetic. One of their songs, called "Wake Up," focuses on how invested many are in this world that we have built.

It goes:

Networks at work, keeping people calm
You know they went after King when he spoke out on Vietnam
He turned the power to the have-nots
And then came the shot.

It may seem odd to speak of Rage Against the Machine in the context of Christian love. They are actually pretty skeptical of religion, but de la Rocha highlights the ways that complex systems work to keep real change from happening, and his lyrics time and time again reveal a willingness to completely dismantle the whole thing. To rage against the machine is to direct all of one's fury at the establishment, in an attempt to completely destroy it.

When I read the news from Buffalo, New York this morning, of a racist white man going on a violent racist rampage, I felt a feeling of rage welling up inside of me. The kind of rage that wants so badly to see this kind of hatred ripped up by the roots. And, I felt sadness, hopelessness, fear. I felt like I was willing to throw the world away, and start over.

Now that might sound really scary to some of you—maybe to most of you. And yes, I would be terrified if society were to collapse tomorrow. I don't think that's what Rage Against The Machine is advocating for in their music, and I don't think that's what Jesus or John the Revelator have in mind either. This isn't just about breaking something down, it's about doing the work that builds the kind of just, compassionate, resilient communities that we want. While we work to dismantle the unjust structures that exist, we've got to be doing the work of repairing the harm they continue to cause. Right now. Right here. We cannot wait for the kingdom to come, we've got to start living in it now.

And, in order for this new world, the kingdom of God, to be a reality—in order to build a just community in which love is central, a place where God can dwell, we are going to have to dismantle a lot. While we might not be inclined to advocate for total anarchy just yet, I think we need to be open to the idea that some of these systems might be beyond salvaging. We are going to have to divest from systems that perpetuate violence and greed and inequality. We're going to need

to clear some ground for new dreams to take root. We are going to have to do some raging against the machines. I want to be clear here, that I'm not talking about the kind of unhinged, chaotic anger that some of us have witnessed. I am talking about righteous anger, anger that stems from a desire to protect those who are vulnerable, or those who are unjustly targeted. That kind of anger comes from a love of justice. I think when we channel that kind of anger into action to protect others, we can consider it *loving against the machine*.

Justice and love are closely related. I didn't come up with that. Cornel West has said that justice is what love looks like in public. Justice is what love looks like in public. This places him squarely in the tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. King understood the relationship between power and justice, and it's rootedness in love. King articulated this in August of 1967, less than a year before his assassination.

King said:

"One of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites - polar opposites - so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love..."

He goes on to urge the Christian leaders present:

"We've got to get this thing right. What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love."

King here is drawing on the thinking of Paul Tillich, the theologian on whom King wrote his dissertation at BU School of Theology, from his deceptively slim, and philosophically dense book, "Love, Power, and Justice."

In our political life, we can clearly see what happens when love and power are separated. We have factions that worship only power, and are willing to disregard norms and values to secure their agendas. And, we see plenty of people who speak of love, but do not do anything to meaningfully change the world.

Neither leads us to justice. Neither truly gives us a vision of the Kingdom of God. One accepts the current world as the only world, and simply learns to play the game, while the other accepts this world as the only world, and speaks of fantastical things that could be possible in another world.

I think Jesus, steeped in a radical prophetic tradition, understood this dilemma. Jesus understood, as John the Revelator understood, and as all radical visionaries understand, that when you believe that justice requires conditions that do not exist in this world, you have to imagine a new world. And sometimes, getting to that new world requires a radical break with this one.

Tillich speaks of the strange work of love: that love destroys that which stands against love. Raging against the machine, tearing down oppressive systems so that more peaceful, more just, and more loving communities can flourish—that is not merely an act of frustration, but an act of radical hope and prophetic love.

Love one another, just as I have loved you. That is the commandment that Jesus gives us. And Jesus has loved us by raging against every machine that locks us out from the beloved community. Hierarchies of gender, culture, class, sexual orientation, ability—Jesus abolishes these systems, placing love at the center of the disciples' life together. The strange work of love is the great undoing of all that stands against love.

We are beginning to see the need for that strange work. We are learning more and more, about the inequalities that have been baked into our national life. We are learning about the things we do and say and think that perpetuate these inequalities, and thanks be to God, we are unlearning many of those things.

The work of abolitionist scholars and activists aims to deconstruct the systems that work against love and justice, and to aid us in unlearning the mindsets that we have imbibed. Abolition, however, is not simply deconstruction. I think Jesus was an abolitionist.

Abolition is creative. Defunding the police is not about laying everybody off—it is about thinking long and hard about how we spend public money to maintain public safety. It's about questioning who is made to feel safer by our policing, and

it is about recognizing that much of what we justify in the name of safety causes a lot of harm.

Canceling debt is not about starting with a clean slate, it is about questioning who has benefited from the current structure—recognizing who's been hurt, and vowing to imagine something more.

Dr. King told us that peace is not simply the absence of disagreement—that's what he called negative peace. Likewise, the absence of laws is not freedom. Abolition is about remaking the world, not undoing it. In the vision of Revelation, the new world comes as the old one passes away—but importantly, that new world does not throw the old one away. You see, that's part of the commitment of abolitionism—we don't throw people away. We don't throw them away in prisons, we don't throw them away into crippling debt, we don't kill them when their demands for justice grow too loud, and we don't throw people away simply because we disagree with them.

The new world has to happen here, in this place, with these people. The new world grounded in that love Jesus was talking about, that love does not allow us to throw people away. We might defund the police, but know that the people behind those badges have a place in the new world. We might cancel the debt, but we know the moneylenders are our siblings too.

Tillich understands love as the force that unites that which has become estranged. Estrangement is the separation of things that fundamentally belong together—that's what sin does. Sin manifests as injustice—as unjust laws, practices, beliefs, that estrange us from one another. The strange work of love, the raging against the machine, is not for us to destroy them. Rather, it is to reveal these structures—to have a revelation, an apocalypse, a great uncovering—and to unlearn systems that diminish the humanity of each and every one of us. It is to understand that the jailer's cruelty to the prisoner is an act of violence against both people. That the moneylender who lords over the debtor, makes themselves into a monster, something less than who God calls them to be.

The former things must pass away. Structural racism, baked into our laws, buttressed by our economic system and enforced by a carceral system—it has got

to pass away. Our economic system, dependent upon a permanent underclass with a steady supply of laborers-turned-debtor—that has got to pass away. Militarism as the only means of securing peace—it has got to pass away. Anemic love, that doesn't dare do the strange work of clearing the ground for new possibilities has got to pass away.

While I would hesitate to call Rage Against The Machine gospel, I can certainly hear some good news in there: do not be afraid to tear down the structures that keep us locked into this way of being. Do the hard, strange work of love—burn the machine to the ground and know that you have prepared the way for God to do a new thing!

We talk a lot about love in Christian churches, and especially in this one. I like that new saying we're trying on: choose love, make it real. I think that vision of John's, of God dwelling among Creation, that image of the kingdom of God, that's what it means to make love real. To do that would be to place love at the center of our lives together—not just in our personal relationships to one another, but at every level of our world, in every corner of our lives. To do that would be to dare imagining another world.

We are on the threshold of imagining another world—we are opening ourselves to something revelational, something revolutionary even. As we consider what our partnership with Charles Street AME has meant, and what it can mean for our story together, we are engaging in the kind of radical, raging against the machine, loving against injustice kind of work that builds a new world right here, right now.

We are channeling the frustration with the machines we see operating, into love that draws us into closer relationship. In the face of a system that has always sought to divide and conquer, we are uniting and creating. Church, that is good news. It's good news that our world needs right now. It takes on the big, scary, audacious task of rebuilding the world without sacrificing the world. It loves against the machines of this world because it loves this world.

Love is the commandment. Power is not the end, but it is what we use to make it real. And justice, if we are willing to dream big scary, hairy, audacious dreams, just might be its outcome.