

It is a very complicated political world: The government- the Empire seems to control everything. The King is chosen, even though dissention resonates across the region. The king is well-known for serving his own interests above that of the people, like kinds came before him.

The country is dependent on the government – for jobs, for healthcare, for protection – but are the people just a customer? A client of services? Bound to the complicated political realities and executive orders that powerful rulers put on the people?

And as is always the case when the Empire reigns, the people that make the nation are plagued by social inequity...disparity between the top 1% adorned by wealth and stature... and the many who are poor and destitute, and even quote/unquote middle class. In this nation there are small and politically inconsequential groups, trying to hold onto a unique culture and customs while avoiding the disapproving gaze of those who rule.

There is a divide, a growing chasm – between the sides...the responses to the rules of the Empire are varying, and it causes dissention, distrust, division.

It causes questions....who am I and who are we? What does it mean to be a resident of this nation? Or to be people of God?

Left wondering what you are you looking for?

Who are you looking for? Where is the hope?

I just described the political world...with which Jesus came face to face.

Rome is the empire, Herod is the king, Israel is the nation, Galilee is the region, the Jewish people are the small inconsequential group – fighting for their culture and customs.

Granted...not all the Jewish people feel the same way. They are divided. Some love the empire. Others despise it. Being “Jewish” in this time period encompassed a whole diversity of beliefs, practices, and political views.

The promise of the Messiah gave hope, and Jesus in flesh and blood was the fulfilled promise.

But even with all the miraculous things Jesus was doing...it wasn't enough. Teaching. preaching, raising the dead to life, calling the lowly fisherman to be disciples, and healing –. curing many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, giving sight to the blind - fell short of expectations.

The Jewish Messiah was expected to redeem Israel from Roman oppression and usher in a Messianic Era -- the kingdom of God on earth.

John – the Baptist who set the path for Jesus – especially feels let down. John is in prison and will soon be beheaded. John proclaimed- This is the Lamb of God – who comes to take away the sin of the world!!! Jesus can't even get John out of jail. Jesus said he would release the captive, and set the prisoner free! But John sits, and waits and doubts. ... no wonder he is ticked.

So he sends his disciples to question Jesus if they should look toward someone else. Seven chapters into Luke...and they want to give up on Jesus as Lord. As the Jews face political upheaval – they need a champion to defeat Rome – and Jesus isn't that, Jesus isn't who they want.

When we are left disappointed with this world, maybe we should look elsewhere for hope.

The political world described is the political world...with which we come face to face. Every day.

We have our own powerful empires, self-serving political kings, nations oppressed, states – crumbling.

We are the people small inconsequential– fighting for justice, peace, equity. Fighting for civil rights. Fighting for acceptance. Fighting for meaningful changes.

Not only a consumer, but an active participant in the government. Only to be crushed by regimes that serve their own interest and continue to cause division.

God – I'm tired of the fighting. I'm tired of not know what is fact and what is alternative fact. I'm tired of inequality, and racism, and homophobia. I'm tired of political games. I'm tired of divisions and negativity. I'm tired of people shooting each other. I'm tired of fighting against people with whom I don't agree – and instead work together. I'm tired of being on a side. I'm tired of losing hope and being disappointed. But – like John and his disciples – I wonder if there is any change.

It a chaotic world we are left wondering who we are, what we are – questioning our beliefs and doubting. We are wondering what we are supposed to do.

John's disciples gave up on Jesus, and looked for another hope.

Jesus said – **listen here!** Every generation is going to face similar divisions and trials... every generation will be looking for hope. But remember the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news. The people are blessed, loved. And that is important!

Face to face in the political world of ego, arrogance, and power, Jesus was clear. He is the only hope for a better world.

Jesus ruled different than political regimes. He took the least of these in the kingdom of God, and made them great. He told us to do the same.

We are only great, when we are humbled. We are only as strong as our weakest link. We are only the best, when we care for the worst among us.

That is hope. That is how any nation is made great.

Healing, forgiving, restoring, loving.

Lifting up our Muslim neighbor, and welcoming immigrant refugees.

Building bridges and relationships with one another instead of alienating.

Putting the needs of the poor above our own.

Sharing equally – like our kids show us.

Standing up against powers trying to control. United communities – dispelling government actions that serve the elite haves, and ignore the marginalized.

We don't always realize hope or change, because we spend too much time fighting against one another, instead of fighting for what God has called us to do.

We know where to look for hope and greatness. In the words and actions of the Messiah. In humanity that follows Christ's example – that cares for human needs. God's miracles realized in us when we care for the least of these.

I think we can acknowledge that the world is messed up in all sorts of ways, we have problems, and we may try to look elsewhere for hope when we are disappointed.

We wonder why doesn't God handle it?

Well, God has, and does, and will handle it - just not always how we like or understand. God's promise is bigger than our expectations, than our own problems disappointments, bigger than our own world or politics or leaders can give. God's promise and love and hope in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ ... trumps everything else.