**Revelation 13:**

**The unholy counterfeit trinity**

This Sunday we look at one of the most interesting and helpful passages in the book of Revelation- Revelation 13. Interesting for its vivid images, and helpful for the worldview this passage presents. A worldview that we ourselves also inhabit. We too live in the time between the first and second comings of the true Christ, when Satan is active along with his human assistants- the two beasts described in Revelation 13.

This Sunday we learn of the dragon’s work through these human agents- an antichrist beast who represents empire, dictatorship, human government that sets itself in the place of God. And the second agent- a beast, a human leader, who uses religion and spirituality to turn hearts to Satan’s kingdom.

In John’s day these two beasts referred to Roman Empire and its local representatives who oppressed the people of the region of modern day Turkey and forced them to worship the Emperor Domitian. But in every age Satan works, imitating, aping, the true trinity. In every age and place the dragon comes to us through a human empire that partners with a priest that turns hearts to idols.

The good news of the Gospel- though the dragon comes to us like this, he is a defeated foe. His activity is constrained. His days are numbered. But we must be alert to and resist his schemes.

**Reflection Questions**

**1**. The beast of empire has horn and crown that points to a desire to wield all authority. It has a blasphemous name, claiming to be god (Revelation 13.1). Originally this likely pointed to the Roman proconsul, the leader who represented the power and claim of Roman Empire over the people of Asia (modern day Turkey, Revelation 1.9-11).

(i) What other governments can you think of over recent centuries that have made similar claims?

(ii) What has life been like for the people they rule?

**2**. The beast of empire can only wield power for 42 months, or 3.5 years (Revelation 13.5-8). This is a symbolic number that points to the time between Christ’s first and second comings. It suggests incompletion- that the story of the church is only partly a story of oppression and persecution.

(i) How is this encouraging to Christians who suffer under totalitarian government today?

(ii) From what we have already learned in this series (or if you flip forward to read the end of Revelation) what does God have in store for his people in the last chapter of his story?

**3**. How is the beast that comes ‘out of the earth’ different to the one out of  the sea? (Revelation 13.11-18)

**4**.  What is the special activity of this second beast? How does he harm people?

**5**. Read Mark 12.12-17. In this passage Jesus offers his famous teaching around the limits of human government. Human authority cannot take from citizens what rightly belongs to God.

‘Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s’

The mark of the beast (Revelation 13.16-18) could be understood to be: any gesture, commitment, or contract to give to human authority what rightly belongs to God.

(i) How might a Christian today avoid commitments that compromise their allegiance to the true God, Father, Son and Spirit?