

God's Justice

Last week a few of us did a podcast about prison ministries and prison reform and criminal justice reform.

The idea being that locking up human beings in cages, isolating them for years from those they love, and failing to provide face to face healing between the wrong-doer and the injured person, rarely leads to anything good.

Instead we have turned crime into a for-profit industry, with private prisons making big bucks on ever stricter laws that lock up ever more people.

And we have ignored the wisdom of our host people, who created places of refuge, and systems to restore healing through ho`oponopono, because they recognized that we all need to live together, and that tears in our social fabric can and must be mended humanely.

So it is with some serendipity that today's gospel is all about God's justice, and how different it is from ours.

Today we are given a glimpse of how we might turn from a life drowning in human justice, to a life that swims in the justice of God.

You may be saying, "Now hold on, the only thing I hear Jesus talking about today is **prayer.**"

But that's because you're not practicing your Greek!

Because the Greek word for "justice" is found 6 times in today's very short Gospel lesson.

So what is it about human justice and God's justice?

In the first place, we humans tend to run away fast from the Living, passionate, "in your face" God of both the Older and Newer Testaments.

We love to replace the Living God with the god of Rules and Regulations.

But we weren't created for rules, we were created for love – of each other, of all of humanity, and of God's very good creation.

Jesus knows all about our infatuation with rules.

That's why he spends his entire ministry pulling outrageous stunts.

Like, kicking the bankers out of the Temple and raising the dead and partying with people long since booted out of polite society.

He wakes us up out of our stupor by telling outrageous stories, like the priest and the sinner who go up to pray, and it's the sinner who comes down justified by God!

Stories like the hated Samaritan whose compassion shames the righteous piety of the church minister.

Jesus says and does these things in order to help us see that the living God is not about rules, but about love, and reaching out, and nurturing relationships.

And so Jesus points us not so much upward to heaven, but outward, toward each other, which, when you think about it, is exactly where heaven is!

Because heaven is all of us together, whooping it up in the banquet hall of God!

And to get there, we need to become human, which is why, in Jesus, God becomes human, so we can experience a truly **human** being.

All of which gets us to the heart of today's parable of the feisty widow and the corrupt judge.

A corrupt judge who cares less about what God or people think, who finally gives in to this pest, "so that she may not wear me out by continually coming," or, translated literally: "Lest she give me a black eye!"

And Jesus says, "Look, if this crook will give something good, how much more will God give, who loves you and wants only the best for you?"

That's one take on this story: God blesses persistent prayer.

But there is something else growing in this parable; one that is all about the justice of God.

And hold on to your socks, because what we come to see is that God is very much like this unjust judge!

Because God doesn't give two hoots what folks think about his over the top, weird, even unfair justice.

I mean, have you taken a look at God's idea of justice?!

There's that arrogant son who demands his share of the inheritance before dear old dad is even dead, only to blow it and come crawling back home; yet his confession is ignored and the party of the year is thrown in his honor.

And if you're thinking, "well, that's just how families treat each other," there's the unjust steward who's caught with his hand in the till, and when he cuts even more into the boss's profit by giving great deals to the folks who owe money; the boss gives him a bear hug!

We expect that God's major concern ought to be separating right from wrong, good from evil, the just from the unjust.

But Jesus says "God isn't like that at all."

Jesus opens our eyes to the fact that we are all hopeless mixtures of good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust.

The outraged men about to stone the gal caught in adultery agree, since none is without sin, so none can throw the first stone.

We are all tangled up in ourselves, like weeds and wheat planted together, and try as we might, we've neither the skill nor the ability to do the separating ourselves.

And so in Jesus, rather than getting a God of just desserts, we meet the God who is nailed to a tree.

Who hangs, smelling of blood and sweat.

Who looks down on we who put him there, only to say: "Father, forgive them...."

You'll agree that a respectable God would slap our heads, determined to make everyone shape up.

I mean, that's what I'd do if I were God!

But we get Jesus, who points to prodigal sons and unjust stewards and corrupt judges and says:

"See, this is what God is like."

He tosses grace and forgiveness around like confetti.

He pardons the unpardonable.

Truth be told, only a bad judge, one who cares less about what people think, can let rotten people off the hook so freely.

And yet, this is how "God shows his love for us, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Rom 5:8

And the question becomes:

Is this a God I want to know?

Because, this God who forgives, who turns the other cheek, who truly loves his enemies, this looks a lot like a loser's God.

"And this is the ultimate dilemma for the church.

Because I can stand here in this pulpit and tell you that God is angry, mean, and nasty.

I can tell you he's so good you can't come within a million miles of him.

Or I can whip you into a frenzy of trying to appease God with remorse and good behavior, with sacrifices; and you won't even bat an eye.

But do I dare stand here and tell you the truth?

That God couldn't care less about sacred guilt or precious lists of good deeds, or earnest good intentions?

Do I dare say that God has cancelled all sacrifices, cancelled all efforts to earn our way into God's good graces?

That instead, he's giving everyone a free ticket into his Kingdom, the only question being, do you want in?

I can't say any of this to you, because, if I do, you can conclude only one of two things: either I'm crazy, or God is." Capon, Parables of Grace, 335 (paraphrased).

Unless.

Unless we can get to that place where, standing before the mirror of God's gentle judgment, we can acknowledge ourselves as the lost, as the prodigal, as the one desperately needing to be found.

And here we come to the intersection in today's parable; the intersection between prayer and God's foolish justice.

If we wish to change allegiance from the sweatbox of human justice to the cool forgiving breezes of God's justice, we must pray.

Because no relationship exists without conversation.

And as you talk story with God, bring your authentic self; bring what you are proud of, but bring what shames you too.

Pray for your needs, but pray also for your hopes and dreams.

Besiege God with your prayers, for yourself, for others, for the world.

But also, sit quietly with God, and experience the embrace of holy silence.

Over time, you may come to see that the justice of God doesn't condemn, it heals, redeems, renews.

Because we are the prodigal, we are the lost, we are the wheat and weeds whose roots are entangled.

We need the healing justice of God.

Which at long last finds us.

Untangles us.

Redeems us.

This healing justice, overflowing with life.

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