

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Mar 20th 2015

Jesus cried out ... I did not come on my own, but the one who sent me, whom you do not know, is true.
(John 7:28)

Today's reading lets the wicked speak for themselves. Their candor is striking: they do not disown their foul ways. These men have betrayed their training and they know it. Corruption has become the norm. What annoys them is being known and judged by the just one: "merely to see him is a hardship for us." But they possess the means to take revenge on this stumbling block. They contrive a test of torture and death to see whether God comes to his defense. This test will decide who has the edge: the just one or the wicked?

The inhabitants of Jerusalem, like others, enjoyed scandals and the occasional shedding of blood. Eagerly they sensed the showdown brewing between Jesus and the authorities. Trouble was coming. Jesus had unmasked the scribes and Pharisees in public; he healed on the Sabbath and his adherence to the laws was doubted. A local guy who claims to be the anointed one, the Christ, is disturbing. Would his followers rise up and seize power? These gossipy spectators grasped little of the scene unfolding before them.

Who is the good person? We might picture someone bent down to wash the feet of the poor. This servant of God moves quietly in the world. She listens, forgives, nurtures, and heals. His touch is gentle and his intentions are pure. Some say that goodness resides in the heart and is largely hidden from view.

Where do we find the just one? Justice leads us away from family, friends, jobs, and parish into public life, where we act in the company of strangers. Jesus made a ruckus. He was not wedded to being gentle. A confounding man, he called out leaders and challenged his community in the name of his father. Justice draws us deeper into history, as we read the signs of the times. At our university we were invited to a dialogue on race. As the topic unfolds, I see how the harsh disparities that have shaped society also shape me. It's not only the wicked who slide into sinfulness. Solidarity among the privileged and oppressed is real when we struggle together. We show up and stay for the long run.

Mercy and justice go hand in hand. Mercy consoles. Justice shines its light into what is possible. Both show us the beauty and the broken in ourselves and in our world.

