

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Mar 14th 2016

Everyone has their favorite, and least favorite, scripture passages. Some passages affirm us in the way we feel about our relationship with God, about the way we live out our beliefs. Others make us uncomfortable, challenging the way we live, revealing a facet of God we don't understand, or telling of shameful behavior by our ancestors in faith.

Scripture passages about the law tend to fall into the "uncomfortable" category for some. At the Easter Vigil in a couple of weeks, Psalm 19 will follow the sixth reading from the prophet Baruch. When I asked one of my cantors to lead it, the response I got was, "You're going to make me sing about the law?! And the fear of the Lord?! I don't like all those limits. I'm all about the Spirit." My immediate response was, "But it's God's law! It's better than ours!" But, there was no convincing this cantor that the Spirit and God's law can and do go together, because they are both of God. The readings today offer similar challenges around that.

In the first reading, people think of the law in very different ways. Susanna and Daniel hold that God's law is most important, even when following it may lead them to suffering under (abuses of) human law. The two elders abuse human law as a tool to support their own power, and do not hold themselves accountable to God's law. This is all the more disturbing because they have been trusted to judge everyone else. In the end, innocence and fairness win out and the malicious elders suffer.

This is not always, or even usually, the ending this kind of story gets. I couldn't help thinking, while reading Susanna's story, of survivors of sexual harassment, violence, and trafficking; of my own Church's part in allowing leaders, trusted to care for the powerless, to abuse their positions of power, an issue recently returned to the forefront of public thought by Best Picture winner "Spotlight." Susanna's story certainly brings up deep pain for many who hear it today. Had I encountered law only in the context of those manipulating it for their own ends, or in the prolonging of suffering, I wouldn't like to think of that word as belonging to God, either.

But God's law is different. God's law is that of the Good Shepherd, who walks with us, brings us to fresh streams and green pastures, and protects us from those who wish to harm us. God's law illuminates – "I am the light of the world." God's law is truth – Jesus knows this so well that the idea of a second testimony to his identity seems almost laughably unnecessary. Jesus says in the Gospel that he, the carrier of the law of the new covenant, does not judge. He simply sees, and loves. This Jubilee Year of Mercy is all about God's law: merciful love.

Love is his name, love is his law:
hear his command, all who are his.
'Love one another, as I loved you.'
Love, only love, is his law.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIWBSiYH_mE

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