

God the Unjust Judge
Sermon for Oct 20, 2013

The widow in today's Gospel reading is relentless in her pursuit of justice. She wants what she deserves and she's not going to stop pestering the judge, unjust or not, until she gets it! That's how we define justice—being fair, giving people what they deserve. In the widow's case she's looking forward to getting what she believes belongs to her, but that's not the case with Jacob.

In our reading from Genesis today Jacob is worried; so worried that he can't sleep. Jacob has every right to be worried! For those of you who have not yet learned about Jacob or have forgotten; here's a brief telling of his story. Jacob is the second born of a set of twin boys. His brother Esau is the oldest and as such Esau is the one who is to receive the family birthright and blessing from his father. Years before today's reading Jacob has tricked Esau into selling him the birthright for a bowl of soup. Jacob has also with the help of his mother tricked old, blind Isaac into believing that he is Esau and gets the family blessing.

When Esau finds out that he's been swindled he's so mad that he wants to kill Jacob. So Jacob flees to his uncle Laban's land and its there that he meets his two wives and builds his fortune. But now God has called Jacob back home and he's worried that Esau will meet him with the justice that he deserves—death and the loss of his possessions. So Jacob puts his family away from him and hopefully out of danger. He's put together a lavish gift of goods and livestock with hopes that it will appease Esau. But Jacob is still worried and his sleep is fitful and restless and in his dream he wrestles with God. Jacob knows what justice he deserves and he's praying that it doesn't happen.

Then there's the story of Jonah and even though it's not part of today's readings it does deal with justice. If there were ever a people whose cruelty against others was so horrible that they should get what they deserved; it was the Ninevites. Jonah was sent by God to preach repentance to them, but Jonah didn't want them to have a chance to get out of being punished so he ran in the opposite direction.

When he finally goes to Nineveh he does the least that he could do, but they listen to him and repent. Jonah is so mad that they won't be destroyed that he sat up on a hill watching and waiting for God to destroy them and give them what they deserve!

Which brings me back to the unjust judge and God; we say that God is just and good and right. We so want God to judge those who have wronged us, who have hurt us and to give them what they deserve. But do we really want God to be just as we define just. Because if God is just as we define it; then we too will get what we deserve for none of us is without sin.

I think that I would like God to be an unjust judge. A just judge would make us pay until every penny was paid back; an unjust judge might forgive the debt like with Jacob and Esau. A just judge would look at our sin and our level of repentance and punish us accordingly. An unjust judge wouldn't care about those things and forgive us.

I don't see God doing anything that a just judge would do. In fact Paul tells us in Romans that while we were still sinners Christ died for us proving God's love for us! Instead of making us pay for what we've done and giving us what we

deserve; God has paid the price! Instead of waiting to see how sinful we would be; Jesus Christ died for us—the ungodly—before we were even born! Instead of doling out forgiveness based on our righteousness, Jesus exchanges his righteousness for our sin!

Thanks be to God for being unjust, merciful and compassionate; who loves us enough to die for us and to give us everlasting life through the death and resurrection of God's son—Jesus Christ! This is the Gospel, the Good News that Paul tells Timothy to be persistent in proclaiming; the news about the God who died for and forgives all our sins. We don't always want to hear about this God because we want others to get what they deserve. Thanks be to God that we don't get what we deserve!