

Justice: the quality of being just; righteousness, equitableness, or moral rightness; rightfulness or lawfulness.

Last week we heard the parable of the good Samaritan, and the sermon that was preached had a lot to do with justice. I don't mean some sort of political, or created justice, or some constructed politically correct notion, or a legal understanding. Lawful according to God's law, right according to what God says is rightful and righteous – just according to God's justice.

Today's Gospel reading is a favorite because it seems so clear and easily understood at first glance: Martha is too concerned with the worldly goings on and needs to be like her sister Mary who sits at the Lord's feet to hang on his every word. This often gets put forth as some kind of push for contemplation over action in life. It is true that we do not live by bread alone, that just as importantly, and more so we need everything that God has to offer, and we need to pay attention to that.

This story of Martha and Mary follows right after the parable of the Good Samaritan. One thing to keep in mind, is that the Samaritan was not so focused on other worldly things like the priest, and was not concerned with worldly things like the second character, but had enough balance of the two to recognize injustice, and need, and allow the Holy Spirit to work through him to respond to that injustice and need.

In a commentary I was reading there was a good line that said that a lot of Christianity was about timing, and in the context of the Gospel reading I took it to mean that there are times for contemplation and there are times for action, and it is good to know the difference between the two, but even more important to be able to respond with what is needed: what I mean is to be able to recognize a situation that calls for contemplation, but rather than continue on our busy way, we respond by contemplating, and praying. And likewise, recognizing a situation that calls for action, and responding with action. It is not simply about being right or wrong, but about what choice gets made in the heat of the moment – what decision gets made – do we allow God to work through us, or do we choose a different way that is our own.

At the beginning of the reading from Amos, there is this whole basket of summer fruit line – is anybody sort of confused by that, how we go from a basket of summer fruit to THE END? Don't worry its not some deep symbolism of imagery or anything like that at least this time. Is actually one of those situations where jokes don't translate well from one language to the next. It is a pun, and a play on words. In Hebrew the word for basket of summer fruit is “gayitz,” and the word for end is “qetz.” Ha ha right?! Kind of cold comfort for the rest of the message that Amos proclaims, his message being one of justice, and of judgement.

Amos proclaims God's dissatisfaction with unjust behaviour – those who trample on the needy, and bring ruin to the poor – treating people as if they were commodities to be bought and sold. God's judgement is pronounced against those who are more interested in selling and in their dishonest profits from overpriced sales, and false business practices than on building up the community and relationship with God, and the time set aside for that with the sabbath. They are distracted by the many things of the world which are false.

The context for this reading is ancient Israel, at a time when there was relative peace and prosperity for a few, at the expense of many. This is what Amos riles against. The parallels though between what Amos describes and of our modern world are shockingly, or maybe not so, similar. The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer. Its not so much that Martha is busy, as what she is busy with. It asks the question of us – what is it that we are so busy with that we cannot take the time to reflect upon what we are doing? In the parable of the Good Samaritan, no doubt the priest was busy, busily on his way somewhere, and the others who passed by the one lying in the ditch were no doubt busy as well, far too busy to stop. That seems to be the picture of our modern world, and it is frightening. There is a lack of balance and equilibrium in the manner of Mary, Martha's sister, there is a lack of God's justice, in the manner of the Good Samaritan. What we have is that balance to share, that justice to proclaim, in the name of God – that there is another way, there is the way of care, and compassion – forgiveness and reconciliation, the way of action, reflection and balance, the way of God's love. That way is the better part, and it will not be taken away from us – a line from a song has been running through my head all week – if we want to see a better day, we'll find a way, nobody can take away the strength that we have! And its true, nothing can take away the strength that we have in God, and it is that strength, that love that will change and redeem the world.