

“Meet the Judge”**Sunday 15 November 2009****@ 7.00am***(9am = Family Service)***Lectionary Readings:****Daniel 7: 9 – 14****Psalm 145: 8 – 14****Hebrews 10: 11 – 18****Mark 13: 24 - 32****Church of the Ascension, Hilton
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Our Scripture Readings today take us directly to the image of God as Judge. Having preached on these and similar readings almost every year at this time, I chose to do something completely different to what I've done before. I played around with the image of a Judge and issues of judging.

I have no legal training, have never stood before a judge or a magistrate in a court of law, although I know lots of “legal people” and there are many in our parish. I've had a brush with the law as a teenager – though was lucky to escape facing a magistrate and suffered punishment in other ways; I've dealt with scary authorities, including military authorities for defiance that I considered legitimate, but I've never yet stood in front of a Judge.

As I thought about some of the images I carry in my mind about these things, I realised there was a mix of very positive as well as very negative imagery. If the Scriptures talk to us of God as Judge, what imagery is it appropriate for me to carry about that? What could be accurate, what could be inaccurate and the simple transferral of (perhaps bad?) human example onto God, for instance? What does it mean to say, “God is Judge” – should I welcome that? Should I tremble in fear, literally?

Have you ever stood before a Judge?

OK – that's a rhetorical question, and there's no need to answer publicly in case it incriminates you and your lawyer isn't here to represent you ☺

Many images and many types of cases, of which these are three examples:

- Straightforward divorce case – already settled between the couple and their lawyers, only needing approval that all is fair and any children are suitably catered for in the arrangement, and then giving it legal effect
- You are seeking justice in a serious matter – you have been wronged or harmed – whether physically, financially or in your reputation – and you trust that wrong will be made right or in some way compensated for, or your dignity restored
- Having a Judge decide whether you are guilty of serious offence or not – and deciding your fate

The matter of a Judge deciding our fate – that’s the part that could be scary, and I presume is the aspect that we would be worried about in relation to understanding God as Judge. Though human and not infallible, judges are required to be impartial and to administer justice. Which is why it causes scandal when they are shown not to be able to do so impartially (prominent people in the press in recent years, like Hlophe and Motata most recently, and a few years ago about Yutar and some of the Judges who tried political cases in the old SA).

But surely we are able NOT to project such imagery onto God as Judge? And these are considered rare instances, and a departure from the norm, which is why they cause great public scandal.

I can understand God as being absolutely impartial without any difficulty. The idea of God restoring dignity to people robbed of it all their life, is extremely positive imagery for me. And of people denied justice, now receiving it.

And we live in a “Moral Universe” – one with Right and Wrong
Justice will be given
All that is wrong, will be put right

God will restore dignity to those robbed of it
Dignity is ours not because we demand it, but because God has made us, and loved us, and we bear God’s image

I can also imagine that, as happened with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – a very human and potentially fallible project, but also one that brought great revelations of truth and great healing of hurts for many, those who have done wrong can be pardoned, given amnesty, on admission of what they did wrong and providing full disclosure.

But who can stand before God and confidently say, "I've done no wrong"? In addition to any deliberate sin, all of us have done harm, or left good undone, and wittingly or unwittingly disappointed the One whom we love – and the One who loves us.

That's what takes us back to the history of Jesus – a constant theme of our faith, with different aspects emphasised at different times simply because there's too much to focus on every aspect all at once. About to be reminded on his First Coming – season of Advent begins in 2 weeks' time.

Purpose: To reconcile humanity to God

To deal with our rampant sinfulness and imperfection, and to present us (like an advocate does) before the throne of God – faultless, thanks to his death and resurrection. We will no longer have to endure the penalty for what we've done wrong. Unless we utterly and contemptuously reject God and what Jesus has done – not out of ignorance or impaired thinking or mental incapacity, but utterly and contemptuously.

Only a few weeks ago, I preached on our NT Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews about the Throne of Grace, where, on the basis of what Jesus has done for us, we are encouraged to come boldly to that throne. Not cringing, not in fear, but boldly. Not unaware of or dismissive of sin, but knowing God's grace in dealing with it...

[Today – similar comments from our reading from the Letter to the Hebrews; Impromptu references to Daniel – OT reading for the day – and to Mark – Gospel]

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Concluded with brief prayer

"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great kindness." (Psalm 145:8)

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THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

Preface used before continuing with APB service (First Eucharistic Prayer)

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The Lord be with you!
AND ALSO WITH YOU!

Lift up your hearts.
WE LIFT THEM TO THE LORD.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God:
IT IS RIGHT TO GIVE HIM THANKS AND PRAISE

It is indeed right to give you our thanks and praise, O God,
for you raise up the broken and humiliated
and seat them in honour at your banqueting table.

The whole universe is yours, for you made it;
you set the earth in place and filled it with life.
Through your law and prophets
you promised a day of justice
when the hungry will have their fill.

You sent your child, Jesus, among us
to establish a new covenant,
leading us in the way of faithfulness
and writing your laws on our hearts.

As a great priest, he offered a single sacrifice for all sins,
and was thrown in to the land of the dead,
but you raised him to new life,
opening for us a new and living way into your presence
and convulsing the earth with the birth pangs
of the new age of your glorious justice.

[Continue with the APB Liturgy]

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