

The theme for our morning's meditation is "God's judgment is just and merciful". When we think of the term judgment we are usually scared. Judgment is usually meted out to punish somebody or to bring an unjust situation to an end. We can be sure when God judges that he will act as a fair and true judge. We can trust him with his judgment because he knows all the facts and therefore always makes an informed decision. His judgments are also merciful because he knows we are weak and sinful human beings and therefore fail to live up to his standards. More than that, he has empowered us with the presence of his Holy Spirit to walk faithfully.

In the Old Testament reading from the book of Isaiah God promised to be compassionate on Israel after their exile to Babylon. He tells them that his righteousness will come soon and his salvation is on the way and that his arm will bring justice to the nations. In other words God is telling Israel that the nations would all be judged by him just as he judged Israel. Very often we invoke God's judgment on others while we are lenient with ourselves. We wonder why God is giving such a long rope to those whom we consider to be wicked while we ourselves keep doing the same thing. We may think that the wicked are flourishing and God is not acting in judgment. However, we need to remember that God's judgment is always just and merciful and his purpose is always to bring us to repentance.

In the gospel reading from the book of John. The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses commanded us to stone such women. "Now what do you say?" According to the Old Testament Law if a man was caught in adultery with another man's wife, or with the girl engaged to some other, then both the man and the woman were to be put to death by stoning. The men had brought this woman to Jesus and were actually posing a trap question. If Jesus upheld the Law and condemned the woman to death, then he would be contradicting his own message of God's love for sinners, as well as interfering with the authority of the Roman Governor who alone had the right to issue a death sentence. On the other hand if Jesus acquitted her, he would have been seen as one who was opposing the Jewish Law. So, either way they would be able to trap him.

John records for us Jesus bent down and started to write something on the ground with his finger and he does this twice. This is the only reference in the whole of the New Testament where Jesus actually writes something. What did Jesus actually write? Some say the Jesus wrote a list of the sins of the accusers. However, according to the text the elders left when they heard what Jesus said and not what they read. Jesus writing with his finger on the ground may be similar to an incident mentioned in the book of Daniel where the finger of God writes on the wall about the impending judgment on Belshazzar. The King was terrified and convicted of his sin even though he didn't understand the meaning of the words. Later on, Daniel's Interpretation confirms that it is indeed a word of judgment. Similarly, what Jesus wrote on the ground convicted the accusers of their sins and had showed them that judgment was already upon them. Jesus then tells them, "If anyone of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

All those who heard this began to leave one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left with the woman still standing there. Jesus asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one sir" she said. "Then neither do I condemn you" Jesus declared, "Go now and leave your life of sin". We see in this that Jesus was both just and merciful. He did not allow the Pharisees and the elders to condemn her and kill her. He made all of them realize that they too needed God's mercy and forgiveness. But he was also a just God. He does not condone sin and challenges her to leave her life of sin.

God calls us to forgive others as he has forgiven us. God's kindness, forbearance and patience are intended to lead us to repentance. This event serves as a model for the church's attitude towards prodigal sons and daughters. We need to remember that God's judgment is just and merciful. However, we should not take his Mercy and Grace lightly and expect to be saved from judgment. May we always examine our own hearts and minds before we point fingers at others.

Shalom

Paul Swarup