

## Lent 2, Year A

- It may be so simple as to be obvious, but nonetheless I think it's worth mentioning: Lent is a great season to think about God
- I think that's worth thinking about because sometimes our Lent, like the rest of our lives, can become about us – about what we feel like we're lacking, about the deficiencies we feel we have that need to be addressed, about the things that we could do better and the ways we could improve ourselves
- And those are all true, at least to some extent
- But more than anything, Lent is a great season to think about God
- There are a lot of different ways to do this – for example, we've been examining the Nicene Creed the past couple Sundays, and seeing what that ancient profession of the faith tells us about the God in whom we place our trust, to whom we proclaim our allegiance
- And then our Thursday evening series on the minor prophets has been a fruitful place to discuss this, too
- The prophets as a whole present a very helpful way of thinking about God, I find
- They tend to emphasize two things about God that we tend to view as in tension: God's justice and God's mercy
- The prophets tell their hearers (and us, their later readers) about the ways in which God's judgment awaits those who turn away from God, those who do the wrong things, those who mistreat or abuse one another
- And we don't always like hearing this judgment pronounced upon God's people
- Though I think if we stop for a moment, we realize we feel much better about God's justice when it's something that happens to other people
- You know what I mean, right?
- I'm talking about that feeling when you're driving down the interstate, going the speed limit (or maybe even a little bit over?) and someone flies past you like you are absolutely standing still
- And then, just a mile or two later, you notice that same car on the side of the road, pulled over by the state trooper they never saw coming
- God's justice doesn't seem so bad right at that moment, does it?
- Or when people do something terrible to us, to those we love, or to those who are vulnerable
- When we see injustices committed, it's difficult to want God to show unconditional love

to those who do evil – it’s difficult to want God to show mercy above all to those who harm others

- We want to believe in justice – cosmic justice – divine justice – as long as it’s for other people
- So that those people eventually get what they deserve
- And the prophets know how we feel
- This past Thursday we read and discussed Joel, who has some wonderful passages about mercy – like where he uses a formula found throughout the Old Testament for thinking about God: “God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”
- That’s one of my favorite ways of thinking about God, one of the ways the tradition has found it most helpful to contemplate God: “God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”
- But Joel also talks quite a bit about the Day of the Lord, and the justice that will be done on that day – to everyone, including the chosen people of God – and that kind of justice can often make us a little uncomfortable
- And then this coming Thursday we’ll be talking about another minor prophet, one of my favorites: the prophet Jonah
- And while Jonah also talks about justice and repentance, the ultimate message in Jonah is one of mercy, mercy so great that Jonah can’t even understand it, has trouble accepting it
- Mercy to those who he does not think are deserving
- And we know all too well how that feels, too, don’t we? When we see someone get a promotion who isn’t the hardest worker, maybe
- But we know how it feels for us, too, don’t we? The knowledge that the worst things that we’ve done have been forgiven by God – that when we repent and return to God, our sins aren’t held against us? They’ve been put away from us, as far as the east is from the west.
- We all know how that feels, right? I hope?
- So the God of the Creed in whom we trust – the God of the prophets who balances justice and mercy – those are a couple ways of thinking about God that I find helpful.
- Our readings this morning fit well into that framework too, don’t they? Help give us some ways to think about God?
- First we have the call of Abraham – this very first moment of the Covenant being established with Abram, before his name is even changed
- This moment when God decides to bless Abram, who had done nothing at all to deserve it

- Paul goes on at length about this in the letter to the Romans, which we also read a bit from this morning – Abraham was not justified by the things that he did, Paul says, but by the simple fact that he believed God – that he trusted God
- And God extends this blessing to all those descendents of Abraham who share his faith – this Covenant is extended to everyone
- That’s another way of thinking about God – God is the type of God who blesses everyone who trusts in God
- God laid out the law, Paul says, so that God has rules so as to exact justice – and yet God is merciful to all those who trust in him
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- And then we have this passage from John – with perhaps the best-known verse of Scripture in verse 16 – though I have to say verse 17 is every bit as good, so I’ll read them both again:
- “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”
- In John’s Gospel, this is just part and parcel with the God in whom we place our trust: God loves us.
- God loves us so deeply that God sends God’s own son, God’s very being, so that everyone who trusts in him need not fear, not even death
- And Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, was not sent to condemn the world, was not sent to exact God’s justice on the world – but instead so that the world might be saved through him
- This morning, we (will talk/talked) about what that salvation actually means for the people who follow Christ – how the early Church used words to describe what salvation was, words like “freedom”, “joy”, “peace”, “faith, hope and love”, “power”
- The Son of God came to give us eternal life, and that eternal life doesn’t just wait for the moment we leave this world behind, but it begins now, thanks to the power of Christ in us, through the Holy Spirit
- Isn’t God good? ...
- This is the God who is calling us back, not just during Lent, but in every season and in every time of our lives:
- God blesses those who trust in God

- God demands justice be done, and
- “God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”
- And God loves you so much