

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, May 13th 2014

Today's scripture readings are an interesting mix. They speak of forgiveness, discernment and inclusiveness. Seemingly contrasting ideas. In Acts, Stephen has been martyred and the Christians scattered. Yet they continue to preach the Good News. To both Greek and Jew. The psalmist proclaims that not only those from Zion know God, but people of Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre and Ethiopia as well. In John, Jesus walks in the temple area and is cornered by those who want to know if he really is the Christ. Jesus states that "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me." Then He makes the proclamation, "The Father and I are one."

The readings were very convicting for me. I want to be discerning, but not judging. And I feel I've been way too judgmental recently. It's like I want a distinct line between us and them. And I want to be able to pass judgment on them. Jews and Greeks. A distinct line between the two. Yet both receive the Good News.

My wife and I are licensed foster parents in the state of Nebraska. In Nebraska, the primary goal of the foster care system is to get the kids back to their biological parents. Sometimes this is impossible, but that is the goal. We have had times where we were told, if the parent(s) show up, call the police immediately. And we've had times where we work with the parent(s) arranging visits with the children.

I sometimes find myself very judgmental of the parent(s). I catch myself looking at them through cynical, jaded eyes. I find myself being disparaging and judging. I blame them for this mess. If they had been hit by a car or in some accident that impaired their parenting abilities, I'd be saying, oh, the poor dears. Instead I sit in judgment. Yet the reality is they probably come from a horrific childhood, drugs, alcohol, a sprinkling of mental illness or a family history of violence. Some may have no clue what love or acceptance look like. And then I expect them to be a good parent? As if I'm the perfect parent. Wow.

I have this image of me telling God to scoot over and make room for my judgmental rear end on the throne. You would think that would incur some extreme wrath. Yet God's patience with me seems to be boundless. God gently steers me away from judgment to encouragement. I'm reminded of a line from the movie *Fat Man and Little Boy*. "You need to stop playing God because you are not good at it and the position is already taken." I don't want to be a judge. I want to be an encourager. It's just that it is so easy to be the judge.

A catchy tune by Toby Mac is called *Speak Life*. When the sun won't shine and you don't know why. Look into the eyes of the brokenhearted; watch them come alive as soon as you speak hope, you speak

love, you speak life.

As a foster parent my job is to provide love, safety, food, clothing and shelter. Not judgment.

My prayer today is for those of us who want to sit in judgment of others. That, with God's help, instead we would be encouragers.

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