

SERMON 918

February 18, 2015

Ash Wednesday

985th Week as Priest

812th Week at St Dunstan's

77th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee



JUSTICE AND MERCY

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Bishop Stough used to say,
“Whenever you are presented a choice between justice and mercy, always try to choose mercy.”

That seems to be the theme of Ash Wednesday, especially as it applies to ourselves. We would much prefer Almighty God to show us mercy than to give us justice.

The Hebrew Scriptures mention justice twice as often as mercy. “Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue,” said the writer of Deuteronomy, “so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”

When the prophet Joel spoke of the Day of the Lord, he was joining with a long line of the Old Testament prophets in a common theme, the destruction of Israel as punishment for its sins. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Ezekiel, all of the great prophets had seen a vision of the Day of the Lord. It was to be a day of darkness and gloom, of clouds and thick darkness, a day of weeping and mourning. It was to be a day of vengeance and retribution. It was to be a day of justice.

If the story had ended there, we would not have known Christ and the surpassing joy of his mercy. But in the fullness of time, God sent his only Son Jesus to save us from our sins, from our own sad selves, and to secure us by his death on a cross. It was a day of mercy.

And lest we think that we are somehow better, or holier, or more deserving than the people of the Old Covenant, we are reminded on this Ash Wednesday that we are alive, rejoicing, and possessing everything only by God's mercy—and nothing more, and nothing less.

The Day of the Lord has been changed to a Day of Salvation, the Day of Justice is now a Day of Mercy. No, we have done nothing to deserve this act of God's grace. But we can choose to respond to the incarnate God who

has come among us as one who saves, he who is God himself, who is Jesus Christ.

What is clear to me is the need that we all have to respond to Christ with loving hearts and minds. “As we work together with him,” said Paul, “we urge you not to accept the grace of God in vain.”

Now is the day of salvation. Now is the fullness of time. As we begin this Season of Lent, Jesus is calling us to a deeper life of faith, a stronger practice of living, and a kinder regard for our neighbors and our selves.

So please join me in the new life in Christ, and in the Observance of a Holy Lent that will lead us to the Holy City Jerusalem, to Christ’s death and resurrection, to the Day of our Salvation, and to God’s infinite mercy.
AMEN.