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Advent 2016: Isaiah 3: 8-15, "They Display Their Sins"

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12/5/2016 Isaiah 3:8-15 They Display Their Sins

Isaiah's promise of judgment sounds perfect even at first reading. We nod our heads when we read that things will go badly for the wicked, who will get what they deserve. Child or adult, perhaps our most favorite human statement is "That's not fair!" We assume the role of judge and jury, look at people and events in our world, and make our determinations. But the phrase as stated is incomplete. What we really mean is "Things aren't going my way and I want them to and they should and it's not fair when they don't!" Our standard for judgment is ourselves and our desires.

There's a clear mental image of what goes with our assertions that things aren't fair. As children, we stamp our feet and shout and get red in the face as we clamor for "fairness"—which is our code for getting our way. As Isaiah points out, the expression of our faces gives us away, and we don't even try to conceal our attitudes. As we age, the physical manifestations of our intent, once so clear, disappear as we learn to dissemble better. To borrow a scriptural phrase, we "hide those things in our hearts." We enjoy indulging in *shadenfreude* when bad things happen to people we consider bad people and think to ourselves "It couldn't happen to a better person; they deserve it!" We believe that we carefully conceal our judgmental attitude, that we no longer so clearly display that particular sin.

Isaiah turns our thinking on its head—as Scripture so often does. He says "God will judge" and then lays out the judgment criteria, which don't match ours at all: you're plundering the poor, taking what they need to live, and rubbing their noses in their powerlessness. In essence, Isaiah says "It's not all about you! The universe isn't centered on you!" And he says "You aren't God! You don't get to judge!"

I can live with not being judge; not well, mind you, but I CAN live with it. I enjoy my *shadenfreude* as much as the next person, but I CAN give up one of life's simple pleasures. I CAN live with not always having my way. Not that I want to do either of those things, not that I do it willingly, not that I do it with any grace at all. But I CAN. What bothers me most in this passage, and what bothers me most as I look toward the Advent of the Incarnation, is Isaiah's intimation that however much I may dissemble, Judge God sees my attitude clearly. I may hide things from those around me, but not from the Judge. I need to align my thinking with the Judge's, get a new set of criteria for looking at my actions, reactions, and lack of action. Scripture tells me plainly that God cares for widows and orphans, for the stranger, for slaves, for the poor. God cares for those who can't care for themselves, whatever their situation. If I am to call myself Christian, if I am to commit to God's Kingdom, I need to play by His rules rather than my own. I need to see people, and my actions, with His eyes of love. Advent's promise is that God can change us; we just have to be willing.

S. Ray Granade