

# “God is Not Fair”

Luke 13:22-30

Much like last week, this week’s appointed Scripture readings, especially the words from Luke’s Gospel, are very challenging. Last week we heard Jesus says, “I came to cast fire on the earth” . . . and that He has not come to bring peace but division. This week, He speaks of those who will be cast out of the kingdom to the place where there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

I hear those words and I am reminded of Dante’s *Inferno*. If you ever get the chance, read Dante’s *Inferno*. It is a wonderful piece of classical literature written in the year 1300 by an Italian named Dante Alighieri. It is actually somewhat of a challenge to read. It is a long poem describing Dante’s fictional tour of the nine circles of hell.

It’s not the easiest read, but what I love about Dante’s *Inferno* is that he presents the nature of sin and judgment really well. Now, Dante’s theology is not extremely sound – he is, after all, a 14<sup>th</sup> Century Italian. However, he understands the problem of original sin keeping us from climbing the mountain up to heaven on our own. The poem begins with Dante in a “rough and stubborn forest” finding his way blocked by three wild animals – which represent the sins of lust, pride, and fraud. These prevent anyone

from attaining righteousness on their own. On that point, he does all right.

Dante then meets Virgil, the ancient Roman poet/philosopher who was a champion of morality and virtue. The writings of Virgil were standard reading in high school and college up through the early 1900's. He was very highly regarded by the Medieval Christians. Dante is surprised that Virgil is not in a better place. If he is in hell – where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, (even though he is in the least hot part of that prison) what does that mean for the rest of us?

However, Virgil points out that he cannot be his guide in heaven, because even though Virgil was an outstanding citizen and champion of morality and virtue, he did not know Christ, and was therefore being justly punished for his sins.

In regard to judgment, as they continue their tour, Virgil offers great insight when Dante looks sympathetically at the sorcerers, mediums, and spiritists whose bodies were twisted and their heads wrenched in such a way that they could not look forward. In their earthly life, they looked into the future and spoke to the spirits – therefore dabbling in places where only God belongs – and their punishment, in addition to the heat and being impaled by horned demons, was that they could never again look forward.

The beauty of Dante's insight is that sin is dehumanizing. As I mentioned in my sermon last week, we are told by the world around us that sin is the fun part of life. Dante understands what a great burden sin is upon our soul both in this world and, for the unforgiven, in the next also.

And Dante gazes on these backward looking creatures with a sympathetic eye. And Virgil scolds him for questioning God's righteous judgment. That is one of my favorite parts of the book. Virgil is absolutely right. God's judgments are just and right and fair.

And there will be many people on the last day who will be shocked when Jesus rightly says, "I tell you, I do not know where you come from."

Now, there is a part of God's judgment that is absolutely not fair – and that is the judgment God the Father made upon His Son. It was completely unfair that, as St. Paul says, "He who was without sin became sin for us." It is completely unfair that the sinless Son of God was mocked, beaten, spit upon, and nailed to a cross to die – enduring the judgment of God upon the sin of all mankind.

It is completely unfair that in exchange for my sin being placed upon Him, He placed His righteousness upon me and called me His child.

On that last day, when that "narrow door" into the kingdom of God is closed forever, we will not get what we deserve. God will not be fair. We will be allowed to remain in the presence of Christ, in the kingdom of God. We will receive new resurrected bodies. We, who should be last, who have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed; by what we have done; by what we have left undone – We, along with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom, will be first in the eyes of God.

As God's baptized children, we truly are the most fortunate people on earth. Even if we were not blessed with our overabundance of worldly

possessions (even with our economic turmoil, we still live like kings compared to most of the world), but even if everything we owned were taken away, we still would be the most fortunate people on earth, because as Jesus says, we have to pass through the “narrow door.” You can’t load up and take anything with you anyway. So the only thing of value we have in this life is our faith founded on the Word of God – because it is the only thing we can take with us out of this life.

In Dante’s depiction of hell, the sinners being tormented lay the blame on no one’s shoulders but their own. All who are in hell being judged recognize that God has been fair to them. There is no excuse, “The devil made me do it.” In God’s fairness, everyone is rightly held accountable for their sin.

However, the good news is that Christ has opened that narrow door through His death on the cross. Sin, death, and Satan do not have any hold on us. And as Jesus says, people will come from east and west and north and south (and even some from the Midwest), and will take their places at the feast which has no end.

Until that time, we get a fore-taste of that feast in the Sacrament, and the promise of life and salvation in Christ. You have a Savior in Christ our Lord who has rescued you and now welcomes you as you take your place at the table in the kingdom of God within the Church on earth and in the Church Triumphant. He knows your name, and He knows where you come from. We rejoice that God is not simply fair. Amen.