

Advent Theme: Judgement

On the four Fridays in Advent we are considering the traditional themes of Advent, the Four Last things: death, judgement, heaven and hell – and their relevance to peace and reconciliation. Today it is the turn of judgement.

Looking at our world today it is easy to think that people can literally get away with murder. The worse the atrocity the less accountability there seems to be. That certainly appears to be the case in areas of conflict such as Syria, where war crimes are committed on all sides. Will the perpetrators ever be brought to justice? Individuals have been brought before the International Court of Justice for genocide and other crimes against humanity. Yet many others escape being brought to book for their actions.

This may well make us angry, frustrated or confused. We may wish for punishment or revenge. But that is not the same as judgement and justice.

For Christians there is a much higher authority than those human courts, an authority that none of us can escape. That authority is God, the supreme judge, the upholder of absolute and perfect justice.

The Christian emphasis on divine judgement is not a comfortable one. It is easy and natural to focus on God's love, compassion and forgiveness – and rightly so. Yet they should always be seen within the context of the holiness, righteousness and justice of God.

There are a number of passages from the Old or New Testaments that I could have chosen with the theme of judgement for our reading just now. I opted for that passage from the fourth Gospel (John 3.14-21), and particularly for those two verses: "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed." (John 3.19-20).

Light and darkness are two images closely associated with Advent. Many parts of our world are dark. Evil is by its very nature dark and shrouded in darkness. All of us have done things of which we are ashamed, and it is natural to want to keep them hidden, not least from ourselves. Yet they are not hidden from God, from God who is light.

The Advent message is one of coming: the coming of God's light into the world in his incarnate Son Jesus Christ. That light can be challenging, even painful. It can bring judgement on us. But it does also bring us life and love.

When we hear of yet another atrocity committed by men of violence let us be assured of God's judgement and justice. How God will judge is for God alone to determine, but we believe he does so always with both mercy and justice.

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Kingsley Boulton*