

A JUDGE WHO FORGIVES

(Acts 10:34-43)

Intro: On New Year's Day, January 1, 2011.

-I was sitting in the bleachers.

#At the Rose Parade.

*On Colorado Boulevard.

*In Pasadena, California.

#Our seats were in Row W.

*I thought this might be a good omen.

+ "W" for Wisconsin.

+ "W" for win.

=That didn't quite work out.

-Across the street.

#In front of the Jaguar dealership in Pasadena.

*Man holding a placard at the end of a pole.

+His sign read:

=JESUS SAVES FROM HELL.

*Maybe his message was meant to be good news.

+But it didn't feel like good news:

=To me.

=To others.

*At the end of the parade.

+He and others fell in line behind:

=Los Angeles County Sheriff's mounted police.

-Last unit in the parade.

+Another sign said:

=CHRIST WILL RETURN TO JUDGE.

#I made the comment:

*"Gee, it seems like they're trying to scare us into heaven."

#Woman sitting next to me said:

*"It scares me to think about ever going back to church again,"

+ "If that's the message I'm going to hear."

Jesus is going to return to judge the living and the dead.

-Scriptures declare that in a number of places.

-We confess that in our creeds.

#Apostles' Creed.

#Nicene Creed.

-How do we hear that?

#Is that good news?

#Is that bad news?

Our scripture reading from Acts 10: 34-43 can maybe help us.

-This is Peter's speech/sermon at Cornelius' house.

#Cornelius was:

*Roman soldier.

*Gentile.

-Peter had just had this vision.

#Net.

#Sheet.

*Filled with all kinds of animals.

+Clean.

+Unclean.

*Coming down out of heaven.

#Voice said:

*"Peter, rise; kill and eat."

#Peter had said:

*"God forbid!"

*"I'm a good Jew."

*"I would never eat anything unclean."

#Voice came back and said:

*"Don't consider anything unclean that I have made."

-Peter then put 2 and 2 together and said:

#"Now I get it."

#"That vision wasn't just about food."

#"It was about people."

*"God doesn't consider anyone unclean because of their:"

+Race.

+Nationality.

-Peter then goes on to testify about Jesus.

#Lord of all.

#Baptized by John.

#Anointed by God with:

*Holy Spirit.

*Power.

#Killed by being hung upon a tree (cross).

#Raised by God on the third day.

#Appointed by God to judge the living and the dead.

#All who believe in him receive forgiveness of sins.

*This is what makes all the difference in the world.

I. Where Else Do We Find A Judge Who Forgives?

A. Not In Our Criminal Justice System.

1. There is no forgiveness there.
 - a. You're guilty.
 - You're not guilty.
 - b. You did it.
 - You didn't do it.
 - c. You're responsible.
 - You're not responsible.
2. But there is no forgiveness.
 - a. If you're innocent/not guilty.
 - There is nothing to be forgiven.
 - b. If you're guilty.
 - You're not going to find forgiveness there.
3. Probation is not forgiveness.
 - a. You're guilty.
 - b. We're not going to lock you up.
 - c. But we're going to keep an eye on you.
 - d. If you mess up again, we may revoke your probation.
 - e. But there is no forgiveness.
4. Parole is not forgiveness.
 - a. Parole comes at the end of a sentence.
 - You've done your time.
 - You've paid your debt to society.
 - #Or at least most of it.
 - You're free to go.
 - b. But that's not forgiveness.
5. Forgiveness is not part of the vocabulary of the criminal justice system.
6. So where do we find a judge who forgives?

B. Nowhere Else In The Holy Scriptures.

1. Our Daytime 5x5 group.
 - a. Using *The Greatest Story*.
 - Bible survey course.
 - Uses the sand art of Joe Castillo.
 - b. This survey covers the entire Bible in 16 sessions.
 - You know it can't get into a great deal of depth.
2. Last week's lesson was on:
 - a. Joshua.
 - b. Judges.
 - c. Ruth.
 - Lot of material to try to cover in 90 minutes.

3. I suggested that we focus on:
 - a. Judges.
 - b. Samson in particular.
 - Last of 13 judges.
4. Biblical judges.
 - a. Between:
 - Exodus and entrance into the promised land of Canaan.
 - Anointing of the first king.
 - #Saul.
 - b. Period of about 200 years.
 - @1200 B.C.E. to 1020 B.C.E.
 - c. Not arbiters of legal disputes.
 - Like our modern-day judges.
 - d. *Lutheran Study Bible* compares them to:
 - Buffalo Bill.
 - Annie Oakley.
 - Davey Crockett.
 - #Superheroes of the wild, wild, West.
 - #Who tried to be a force for:
 - *Justice.
 - *Cause of right.
5. Samson was a judge.
 - a. When the Israelites and the Philistines were butting heads.
 - Judges 13-16.
 - b. Samson was a cross between:
 - Practical joker.
 - Gangster.
 - c. He picked a fight with the Philistines.
 - d. Philistines tried to retaliate.
 - e. Samson got even.
 - f. Philistines again tried to retaliate.
 - g. Back and forth they went until:
 - Samson was dead.
 - Lots and lots of Philistines were dead.
 - Philistines' crops, vineyards, and olive groves had been destroyed.
 - h. There was no end to the conflict.
 - Because there was never any forgiveness.
6. Day before the Rose Parade.
 - a. We took a tour of some of the float barns.
 - To get an up-close-and-personal look at some of the floats.
 - #As the finishing touches were being put on them.
 - b. One of the floats I got within arms length of:
 - 9/11 float.
 - Remember, Reflect, Renew.*

- c. This September will be the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.
 - We still haven't found Osama bin Laden.
 - What if we did?
 - #Find him.
 - #Bring him to trial.
 - #Convict him.
 - #Execute him.
 - *I'm prejudging the case.
 - Would that bring an end to this War on Terror?
 - Would that bring peace on earth?
 - #I doubt it.
 - It will just be more of Samson and the Philistines.
 - #Back and forth.
 - #Strike and counter strike.
7. How can there ever be real peace without a judge who forgives?

II. Baptism Opens The Door To A Judge Who Forgives.

A. Jesus Was Baptized.

- 1. Heaven opened.
- 2. God anointed him with:
 - a. Holy Spirit.
 - b. Power.
- 3. How did Jesus use that Holy Spirit power?
 - a. To zap the bad guys?
 - No.
 - b. Peter says he went around:
 - Doing good.
 - Healing.
 - #Not just some.
 - #But all who were oppressed.
 - *People of every:
 - +Race.
 - +Nation.
 - c. Jesus carried out his ministry.
 - As a judge who forgives.
 - d. Jesus was nailed to the cross.
 - As a judge who forgives.
 - e. Jesus was raised from the dead.
 - As a judge who forgives.
 - f. Jesus will return at the end of time.
 - As a judge who forgives.

- B. We Have Been Baptized.
1. What does our baptism mean?
 - a. Is it just fire insurance.
 - To protect us from the day of judgment?
 - b. Or is it something more?
 2. When we were baptized.
 - a. Heaven opened.
 - As it did for Jesus.
 - b. God anointed us with:
 - Holy Spirit.
 - Power.
 3. How do we use our Holy Spirit power?
 - a. To zap the bad guys?
 - We might get zapped ourselves.
 - b. Or to:
 - Live.
 - Love.
 - Serve.
 - #In the name of a judge who forgives.
 4. December 2010 issue of *The Lutheran*.
 - a. ELCA's monthly magazine.
 - b. Had a little article entitled "Craving Forgiveness."
 - Study by the Michigan-based Fetzer Institute found:
 - #62% of Americans feel a need for more forgiveness.
 - #94% wish there could be more forgiveness in the country.
 - But more than half thought there should never be forgiveness for:
 - #Abuse.
 - #Sex crimes.
 - #Murder.
 - #Other intentionally committed crimes.
 - c. We want forgiveness.
 - For ourselves.
 - d. But we want vengeance.
 - For everybody else.
 5. Winter 2010 issue of *On Wisconsin*.
 - a. My college alumni magazine.
 - b. Has an article:
 - Entitled "Opening the Door to Forgiveness."
 - About a program which brings face-to-face:
 - #Victims of violent crime.
 - #Those who have hurt them.
 - *So that there might be forgiveness.
 - +In a system that tends not to know forgiveness.
 - =Could you do that? =Could I?

6. In the waters of Holy Baptism, we have been:
 - a. Washed.
 - b. Named.
 - b. Claimed.
 - By a judge who forgives.
7. In the bread and wine of the Holy Supper, we are:
 - a. Named.
 - b. Claimed.
 - c. Nourished.
 - By a judge who forgives.

Concl: It's not easy to summarize:

- All of Scripture.
- Our own faith.
 - #In a slogan that might fit on:
 - *Placard.
 - *Bumper sticker.

But if we did.

- I'm not sure what I might come up with.
- But maybe we could do worse than one which reads:
 - #JESUS IS A JUDGE WHO FORGIVES.