

Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

I spent Election Day in Chicago, my hometown. Now, elections come and go-- but this one was different. This year in Chicago, there was an unmistakable feeling in the air. The weather was divine: Seventy degrees in November, if you can believe it. I walked by the big silver bean downtown at nine in the morning, and standing before it was a great line of TV reporters from all over the world, filming what they knew was the first draft of history. I had lunch in a pizza place in Hyde Park; and on that day, all the cooks and servers wore t-shirts, covered in the flour of their labor, that read, "Barack Obama eats here!" His name was on every tongue. Street vendors with buttons and flags shouted it all afternoon, their slogans of hope mingling on Michigan Avenue with the sellers of hot dogs and popcorn.

When night came, I was in Union Station, waiting for my train back to Boston. From the station bar, I watched children streaming in off the commuter rail, teenagers from the South and West Sides, ready for once in their lives to make that skyline their own. And there on the stool next to mine sat a very drunk Republican woman. The polls began to close; CNN turned Ohio blue. She nursed her dry white wine, and she declared this was the end of the world.

I want to be careful here, because Obama isn't Jesus. But they are similar in the effects they have had on people's hopes. And that's the backdrop we have

to have for this morning's gospel. This is a story about hope, about change so thick in the air it changes the light and fills your nostrils. "Now is the judgment of this world," Jesus said. And for his people, that was good news! "Now the ruler of this world will be driven out," Jesus said. And for his people, that was very good news! Jesus' people believed they had more to gain than to lose from justice. And in a very real sense, they were right. To an oppressed and occupied people, judgment day is the best news of all. It means a change is gonna come.

When I first got a true glimpse of Jesus' message, I had to change my whole concept of judgment day. Growing up, I believed that judgment day would be all about my private sins. Everything I was ashamed of-- every little thing I'd forgotten, every little thing I'd rather forget-- would be suddenly revealed to a cold, cold world. I'm not sure quite when that image of judgment day took hold. In retrospect, I think it was probably sometime in middle school. Because, you see, that's an image of social humiliation. It's the worst petty conflict, imagined on a grand scale: The junior high apocalypse. Nothing but drama.

How different is the scene in the gospel! Here is drama, too-- or better yet, an epic, with a cast of thousands. As Jesus spoke, the children of Israel had filled every corner and cranny of Jerusalem. They had come for the Passover, to celebrate the memorial of their liberation. Every year, they went up. But this year was different, and everyone knew it. There was an unmistakable feeling in the air. Crowds of the dispossessed came pouring in from every forgotten corner

of Israel. Even foreigners lined up to see this man on the day he was to be glorified. The soldiers watched cautiously as this peasant denounced the ruler of this world. And the priests stood dumbstruck as this messiah from nowhere stood in the midst of their temple and declared his hour had come. They knew he meant the end of their world.

History has not judged those leaders kindly. But we should not render our judgment too easily. They were realistic men. They saw in Jesus a peasant's revolt. They knew such a revolt would only bring down the iron fist of Rome, which no human power could resist. They knew it would only restart the old story of retribution and exile. Like most stories about politics, it is based on fear, fear of humiliation and destruction before a power greater than your own. In other words: That's right, it was middle school.

And in fact, all their political realism could not save these leaders from their inner middle school. The Pharisees fought the Sadducees, Herod and his court squabbled with the Roman authorities, and the Zealots took pot shots at everyone. But when Jesus' day came, all their petty drama was stilled. Herod and Pilate kissed and made up. The Pharisees and Sadducees realized they had a common enemy. In the face of justice, lesser kinds of judgment find a new and terrible focus-- the deadly urge to self-defense. Rather than face the judgment they feared, they put justice on a cross.

They could kill Jesus; but their injustice could not free them from his justice. They just wanted to get through the week unscathed; but two thousand

years later, we know their names, and their crimes, so well that we forget their humanity too easily. They just wanted a few thousand pilgrims to stay quiet; but two billion Christians are joined this Sunday to raise a joyful noise. They just wanted one man dead! It isn't Easter yet, and I don't want to ruin all the suspense. But please, know this much: As we gather to celebrate the memorial of our redemption, he is really present with us, in the bread, and in our bodies.

And so he stands among us now. In our hearing, he proclaims his message. That message is the same today as it was yesterday, in Jamaica Plain as in Jerusalem: We can leave behind all fear, and all pettiness. We can let go of all the times we've been judged, and all the times we've judged others. And we can do that because, as Jesus proclaimed, Now is the hour of justice. Now all the oppressors of our bodies, hearts, and souls will be driven out. For Christ meets us at this table and draws all people to himself. Amen.