

I served on jury duty once in my life. Have most of you done that? It was not convenient to serve, but it was a rich experience of justice at work. The plaintiff was injured in a car accident, and she wanted more money out of the defendant. Twelve ordinary people with only common intelligence sat down to decide this case. It was not an especially wise verdict, but it was a fair one.

Advent is the season when the world cries out for a fair hearing. And the one who will set things right is not a jury of twelve, but the Messiah.

On each Sunday of Advent we hear a prophecy from the Old Testament. These prophecies encouraged Israel in its struggles. Whether the ruler was a demagogue, or the people were in exile, the prophets reminded them that the Messiah would come to set things right.

As we begin this Advent season I think of many ways our world yearns to be set right: The countries in the Middle East argue about how to come to the table to discuss what they're arguing about. The Orthodox bishops of the Soviet Union will not meet with Pope John Paul to discuss the growth of Christianity after communism. Employees at Allied Signal are worry about massive layoffs. Our Community Assistance Council cannot meet all the requests we get for food, lodging, and utility bills. Many of us feel misjudged or mistreated by people we know. All over the world we need someone to be a jury, we need a Messiah who will set things right.

Today's prophecy proclaims that God will raise up among the offspring of King David a just shoot; a ruler who will do what is right and just in the land, so that people will call Jerusalem, "The Lord our justice." When God promises a better future, what interests him is not wealth or property, not health or longevity. What interests God is justice--that people will do what is right and just in the land. Justice is what interests God.

What worries me is that justice does not always interest us. Oh, we'll take someone to court if we need to, but that's often for vengeance rather than justice. Sometimes we'll cheat people since a profit means more than justice. Sometimes we'll punish people because anger feels better than justice. Whenever we prefer ourselves to justice we make Advent a little harder. To celebrate a rich Advent, we don't need wealth, we don't need jobs, we don't need property. All it takes is to set things right.