

March 31, 2021

Read John 11

Key verse: John 11:48

'If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation.'

The Systems of Man

A while back, I upgraded my cell phone service and later discovered that the company was charging me for my old service plan (as well as the new service plan) until the one-month contract of the old plan had expired. After a long wait on the phone I spoke to service representatives and a manager who explained to me that they could not credit me for the additional charge because “the system doesn’t allow it.” I soon realized it was pointless to argue with them over what was ethical because they were enslaved bound to the system as much as the customers were. Since then I have changed service providers.

The injustice of my phone service provider’s “system” cost me about \$20, but the injustices of other systems can cost folks a whole lot more. Racist, misogynist, and homophobic policies hurt people physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. And sadly when the reality of these injustices are brought to our attention and those who suffer cry out for change, many people respond the way those customer service agents responded: “The system doesn’t allow it.”

That’s how the Pharisees and priests in today’s reading responded to Jesus’ message. The “system” was one where might makes right, and the mightiest entity of all was the Roman Empire. The Roman “system” was not as bad as many others, but it still insisted that those with the strongest armies get to design a system that keeps the strong in power, and any existential threat to the system will not be tolerated. Caiaphas and his cronies were probably not big fans of Roman rule, but they knew what the cost would be for resisting their rulers, and so Jesus would have to die so Judea could survive.

Jesus represented a paradigm shift that the world was not ready for. Jesus advocated a new “system” where the greatest among us is the one who serves the most, where we wash one another’s feet, where we tend to the needs of the “the least of these.” To use a cliché, *it all looks good on paper*, but we are afraid of what might actually happen if we committed ourselves wholly to caring for others and treating all people fairly and compassionately. We are stuck in the system.

But we are people of faith, and our faith is in God’s rule, in our lives right now, and in this world eventually.

Prayer: Holy God, how often have we prayed “thy kingdom come” while we remain enslaved within our own kingdoms? Strengthen our resolve to live according to your system, as Jesus did. Amen.