"I shall feed them with justice"

God seemed a tad angry back in Ezekiel’s day. In exasperation God declared that “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep.” (Apparently God couldn’t count on anyone else.) And what was God’s agenda? “I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the stray, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.” As for those who had failed to care—“the fat and the strong”—they “I will destroy.” How? “I shall feed them with justice.” (Ezekiel 34:15-16)

Following what we viewed as a meaningful event this past February, we recently began planning for another Advocacy Days in 2004, and we chose this verse for our theme: “I shall feed them with justice.” I think it was a good decision, and not just because it was my idea! There’s a lot you can do with that passage. You could have a lively debate as to whom God was going to feed justice. I gave it the twist, above, that an angry God felt justice was what the fat and the strong needed for their diet, but I suppose a case could be made for its application to everyone. The weak and the injured and the lost could well do with a serving of justice, not provided angrily, but from a well, sense of justice!

Here, I want to stick to the message that God will destroy the fat and the strong through a diet of justice. I’m convinced it’s time—past time—for us to be angry. It’s even fair enough to talk about destruction.

The agenda of the Bush administration, in bipartisan complicity by the Congress, is—simply put—for the rich and powerful (God’s “fat and strong”) to be rewarded with more riches and power. In order to do that, they need to present occasional images of “compassion.” And so they march out the elderly and pretend to offer medical benefits while in fact trying to remove the government from caring by setting up drug programs through private profit-making ventures. They march out family farmers and pretend to care about the burden of estate taxes, taxes few family farmers even face (it’s the one per cent of the nation’s wealthiest that are affected). They march out Africans suffering from HIV/AIDS and pretend to care about how urgent it is to address the crisis, while in fact they propose to move slowly in providing funds and to avoid effective multilateral efforts, preferring to cooperate with no one. The margin between rich and poor widens, at home and in Africa. People cannot afford health care, at home and in Africa.

Human rights are denied, at home and in Africa. And the agenda here in Washington, confirmed again and again as our elected leaders are purchased by the wealthy to do their bidding, is that all of life is a commodity, to be valued in economic terms alone, the cost to be borne by the weak, the profit to be gained by the fat and strong. It is time, past time, to be angry.

What do we do? What can we do? Ezekiel’s God has a suggestion. Destruction. Sounds dangerous, counter-productive, even illegal, doesn’t it? But the method: We feed them with justice. We offer an alternative vision of right relationships, of genuine compassion, standing with those without shelter and food and clean water and clothing and work—with all of us abused and marginalized by the fat and strong. Over and over again, assertively, unequivocally, we say no. This is not, ultimately, something to be dismissed as a political agenda. It is not “class warfare”—as some in Congress and this administration have foolishly called it—as if naming the wrongness of a self-serving agenda is itself the source of the problem. This is a justice agenda, and who better than people of faith to offer it as food?

Yours faithfully,
Leon Spencer