

SERMON: 2018/12/26 (Saint Stephen's Day, Yr. C) - *Jeremiah* 26:1-9,12-15; *Acts* 6:8-7:2a, 51c-60; and, *Matthew* 23:34-39_BTR

If you were paying attention to the *pretty* harrowing tale we just heard from (the Book of *Acts*), you might be wandering to yourself why we're talking about such things that seem sooo out-of-touch with what is supposed to be a season of peace on earth and goodwill to all people.

What a horrible - *and unwelcome* - dose of reality to "pop" your "bubble" of "Christmas Cheer!"

Or it is?

Is your glass of eggnog half-full or half-empty?

Yes, one could focus in on the cruelty of a mob callously - *viciously* - stoning a young man who'd *no* wrong.

(Indeed, we know he was a person of charity and kindness: one of the seven deacons who spearheaded the Church in Jerusalem's first outreach "initiative" to the poor, hungry widows in the city.[6:1-5])

The hostility and prejudice of the public against this member of a minority religion; their failure to "tolerate" and be "inclusive" - to be "diverse," should, perhaps, resonate with your feelings about the current polarized, nasty political climate in this country; where people hurl - not rocks - but mean tweets and accusations. The abject failure to "grapple" with an alternative point of view, and outright, knee-jerk rejection of it.

But another way to look at this episode is to see the inspiring courage of a Christian who held to the truth of Christ as fully divine yet man - 'the Righteous One'[6:52]; as a champion of unfashionable - *but transformative* - orthodoxy, when others - in our day and age - increasingly compromise The Gospel in the face of pressure and fashion.

It is thanks to men and women like Stephen that there is any Christianity today and wonderful festivals such as Christmas at all.

Let's pray: Father God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.