We delude ourselves dangerously if we think our major task in hearing the scriptures is to hold up the past to scrutiny, to examine the historical period in which prophets denounced and cajoled and prodded, embarrassed their hearers, the people of God, into living a life of integrity.

Prophets like Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Amos have a very difficult task - that is, to speak to us today. Their words are not dead but alive - to those who are able to hear.

What if our contemporary Church is heard to say, "The Lord's ways are unfair"? What if we are the ones that help create the conditions for people with few resources to "turn from virtue and commit iniquity"? Then Ezekiel's words might shake us.

Yet, I suspect that for most of us God is not the problem. The problem is those damn human beings that God created, especially the creeps who don't deserve to exist, or at least those who bother us or impinge on our will to power - you know, the will to do things "right." My way.

Paul has a great sense of this paradox in his Christological hymn: the best indication of our highest reach for God is the person within arm's reach. Be of the same mind as Christ. In other words, wholeheartedly loving God and loving neighbor as ourselves are intimately linked. Our very relationships to each other embody our relationship to God (Kavanaugh, The Word Embodied, 108). The exalted hymn to Christ we hear today is the application of a way of life that Paul recommends in our relationships to each other. It exemplifies the mind of Christ we must put on as we face each other.
"The reason we avoid community life is the challenge it makes to our narcissism. In authentic relationship, the love we dream about is tested and purified by the actualities of "this particular person at this particular time" (108). We say earnestly we want to live together in all our diversity, that we are stronger together, that there is something wrong in not understanding the other, whoever we encounter as other.

In the story Jesus told the priests and the elders, one son mouths the words but does not act; the other son resists at first but eventually labors in the vineyard. The second child actually does God’s will. Words are not enough. That is why converted tax collectors and prostitutes enter the reign of God before those who merely talk of righteousness.

Here are the temptations of this day:

- To keep the scriptures at arm’s length so as not to be challenged to conversion.
- To fail to acknowledge our resistance to do the hard work of learning how to love, to go out into the vineyard.
- To our work of constructing a society that is inclusive and where all persons experience being valued.

We so often talk of love. But the living of it requires a great winnowing of our lives, a shaking down of our pretense. Love in dreams is easy, but the reality of love is a dreadful assault on our tawdry delusions.