

Date: June 14, 2009

Title: Justice for All

Scripture: Psalm 72

A psalm of Solomon.

¹ Give justice to the king, O God, and righteousness to the king's son.

² Help him judge your people in the right way; let the poor always be treated fairly.

³ May the mountains yield prosperity for all, and may the hills be fruitful, because the king does what is right.

⁴ Help him to defend the poor, to rescue the children of the needy, and to crush their oppressors.

⁵ May he live^[2] as long as the sun shines, as long as the moon continues in the skies.

Yes, forever!

⁶ May his reign be as refreshing as the springtime rains— like the showers that water the earth.

⁷ May all the godly flourish during his reign. May there be abundant prosperity until the end of time.

⁸ May he reign from sea to sea, and from the Euphrates River^[3] to the ends of the earth.

⁹ Desert nomads will bow before him; his enemies will fall before him in the dust.

¹⁰ The western kings of Tarshish and the islands will bring him tribute. The eastern kings of Sheba and Seba will

bring him gifts.

¹¹ All kings will bow before him, and all nations will serve him.

¹² He will rescue the poor when they cry to him; he will help the oppressed, who have no one to defend them.

¹³ He feels pity for the weak and the needy, and he will rescue them.

¹⁴ He will save them from oppression and from violence, for their lives are precious to him.

¹⁵ Long live the king! May the gold of Sheba be given to him. May the people always pray for him and bless him all day long.

¹⁶ May there be abundant crops throughout the land, flourishing even on the mountaintops. May the fruit trees flourish as they do in Lebanon, sprouting up like grass in a field.

¹⁷ May the king's name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun shines. May all nations be blessed through him and bring him praise.

¹⁸ Bless the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does such wonderful things.

¹⁹ Bless his glorious name forever! Let the whole earth be filled with his glory.

Amen and amen!

I want to ask you this morning has this ever happened to you: You are driving down the road and you see in your rear view mirror a car coming up at remarkable speed from behind you. You check your own speed to see if you have inadvertently let your foot come up off the accelerator, but no, you are going exactly 3 miles over the limit; just a little slower than everyone else around you. But this car is zipping in and out of traffic, passing every car it can, and eventually it passes you like you're the turtle in the race

between the Tortoise and the Hare. You think to yourself, "I sure wish people couldn't just get away with that kind of driving. Where are the Highway Patrol when you need them?"

But then, about 5 minutes later, you see the very same car stopped by the side of the road in front of a Highway Patrol officer who is giving them a ticket. Doesn't your heart just sore when something like that happens? It doesn't happen too often, at least not so we see it that obviously but occasionally it does happen.

That's justice, right? The person so obviously in the wrong gets what he or she deserves. It's a common theme in many of the movies we watch; the "Dirty Harry" movies, the Rocky movies, all the super hero movies. (At least the ones I have seen)

There is just something about the human spirit that seeks justice. When I used to believe that my parents were favoring one of my sisters or brother I would cry to them, "That's not fair!!" To which my father would answer, "Who told you that life is supposed to be fair?" (He really used to say stuff like that! Now you know why I am so maladjusted.) My father would tell me that indeed life isn't fair and suggest that I get used to it, but I have to tell you that deep in my gut I have always wanted life to be fair.

Realistically, I think that we all want life to be fair. In his book Mere Christianity, C.S Lewis talks about the innate sense of fairness that we human beings all seem to possess. He calls it the Moral Law and he argues that when we complain about the immoral behavior of someone, we are calling upon that moral law that everybody should know. Kids are referring to it when they cry, "it's not fair." Adults are assuming that this moral law exists when they speak out against the unjust practices of a government, a corporation, or of another person.

Our Bible has numerous stories about people living up to this "Moral Law" and about people violating the "Moral Law." The story of the woman caught in adultery is an example of the religious leaders of the time trying to impose their understanding of the "Moral Law" upon this woman who had severely broken the Law. They wanted to stone the woman and Jesus turned the issue of fairness around when he said, "All right, stone her. But let those who have never sinned throw the first stones!" (John 8:7 NLT) Of course, put this way, no one threw a stone at her. I heard the story told a different way where after Jesus said, Let those who have not sinned throw a stone everyone dropped their stones and turned to go except for one woman who remained poised and ready to throw the stone. Jesus looked at her and said, "Mom! I'm trying to make a point here!"

But it is true, isn't it, that we all seem to have this notion that justice should prevail. The psalmist writes: "Give justice to the king, O God." And this makes sense because probably more than any other person, if the King who had nearly absolute power was not fair, there wasn't much you could do about it. Our founding fathers were trying mightily to organize a system of government that would insure "liberty and Justice for all."

Of course in hindsight, we realize that the term “liberty and justice for all” actually meant liberty and justice for all white men with property. If you were a Native American Indian or an African slave, you were excluded from this equation. These are just a couple of examples of the problem that we get into when we start defining and trying to bring about Justice in the world. When we start trying to define justice and to create fairness, we have to watch out that we don’t bend the law of nature to fit our own personal wants and desires. It is tough because when it comes to interpreting our behavior in light of what is right, just, or fair, there is almost always an element of self-interest that is factored into our interpretation of what is fair.

The image I have is of that blindfolded woman holding the scales; you know the one who is supposed to represent blind justice only she is peaking out from under her blindfold to make sure her side of the scale is not slighted. It’s too bad that we can’t trust ourselves to be completely objective when it comes to justice, but I’m not sure we can help it. From what I have seen, the self-interest urge is so strong in all of us that it takes something huge; something almost unnatural to get past it.

What I suggest to you is that Jesus gave us what we need to get past our overwhelming sense of self-interest when He died on the cross for us. The greatest injustice of all time occurred when The Son of God was nailed to a cross for crimes that he did not do. He had the power to dash every one of his accusers to the ground without lifting a finger..... But instead in agony and pain, he called out to God, “Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

The huge something that Jesus gave us that allows us to see beyond our own desires and wants was “Mercy.” Born out of a love that exceeds our imagination Jesus chose to show us mercy. He chose to show us mercy we did not earn; mercy we did not deserve. If we did earn it or deserve it, it wouldn’t be mercy would it? It would be justice. Mercy is getting what we don’t deserve. Mercy is sinning like crazy and having Jesus say, “I forgive you. Not because you are worthy of forgiveness, not because you have earned the right to be forgiven. No, I forgive you simply because I love you and I want you to move on with your life.” The divine mercy that was born of Christ’s love for all of us combines with divine justice to give us hope for tomorrow.

See, here’s the thing: I really don’t think it is possible for us to bring about justice without throwing in a strong helping of mercy. I guess it could be possible that by accident we might do exactly the right thing; take just the right action; not being too harsh or too lenient.... If we knew every aspect of truth surrounding the situation, we might be able to create a perfectly just outcome to every wrong we sought to right. If we knew every subtlety of motivation that caused the injustice in the first place perhaps then.... we could correct the injustice without going too far and creating further injustice.

But we don’t know every aspect of truth about a situation. We don’t know all of the factors leading up to a person acting unjustly. We can speculate and we can guess. We might even ask that person, but because we are human beings with limited understanding of all that goes on in the world, we see only, as Paul says, “as through a mirror dimly.” (1Corinthians 13:12)

Now, I'm not suggesting that we do nothing. If people in this country and in the world had not recognized the injustice of slavery, and then acted to stop it, the human misery it caused would likely still be openly occurring today. If thousands of young people had not been willing to **risk** and too many times **give** their lives to right the wrongs of Hitler's vision for the world, we might be living under the tyranny of Nazi oppression today.

No, there is without question, a time to stand for justice and against injustice in the world, but if we do not allow mercy to temper our zeal for justice, we run the risk of creating a worse situation than that with which we started.

Imagine if you will, a brick wall. Look at the brick walls of our church, for example. Do you think that those walls would still be standing if Dan Ury and the other masons who laid up the bricks had simply stacked the bricks up without putting any mortar between the joints? Of course they might have stood for a while, but without mortar, the slight imperfections in the bricks would have caused them to lie unevenly and by the time they stacked up to the prescribed height, they would likely have collapsed or been so unstable that you couldn't attach a roof to the wall. Now, maybe, just maybe, if the bricks were perfectly made without imperfections, they would stack up and hold the roof up. But when I say perfectly made, I mean without any little grain of sand or imperfection sticking out to make the stack uneven.

What I am suggesting is that our understanding of justice is imperfect. But we can't help that. And in-order for us to effectively stand against injustice, we need to work together in spite of our imperfect judgments and understandings. But it is very difficult for my imperfect perspective to come along side of your imperfect perspective unless there is something that will buffer our interaction.

The something that allows for the imperfections in bricks is mortar – in the pursuit of justice that something is mercy. In the fight against injustice, if we are to make progress, we need to put our imperfect bricks together; one stacked on top of and along side of another with the goal as stated by our scripture this morning of “defending the poor, rescuing the children of the needy, and crushing their oppressors.”

There is no question that our understandings and our perceptions are flawed. And if we hold too tightly to those understandings and perceptions, it can be almost impossible to work with others, especially when our views don't exactly line up with theirs. But with the right balance of seeking justice and granting mercy, we **can** work together to accomplish justice for all; not my justice, or your justice, but God's Justice. Amen.