

### “The Promise of Justice”

Advent is a time of great promises from God to us. And new promises bring new covenants. The old covenants were worn and well-broken. Israel’s great capacity to sin consistently erected a “wall of hostility” between themselves and God. That separation ... that alienation grew wider and more bitter. Time after time, God reached out to them, but was pushed away by their inward drive to *be* God ... to be all-powerful ... be all-controlling. Filled with self rather than God, they kept God at a distance for which they paid a heavy price ... being lead into exile time and time again.

I believe that at the time of the birth of Jesus, God realized that there was much that was wrong with the Creation. So out of pure love, God reached out to all human beings in the most intimate way that God could ... God came to us in the flesh. God came to right a wrong relationship. God came to reestablish once and for all His love, hope, peace, and justice ... all of which are the tenants of our own salvation. In Jesus of Nazareth, God came to remove the wall of hostility; bridge the gap; heal the sin sick soul; establish His rule ... whatever the metaphor! Advent then is a time of God coming to us ... God with us ... Emmanuel!

In order to reestablish His rule, God will be King ... but a King in a way that redefines the term of “servant,” or “the least,” or “the last.” This King will right the wrong ... establish God’s justice with integrity and faithfulness ... power will be given to the powerless. God will make things right, but in God’s own way. Rather than a parity of justice where the emphasis is on equality, the biblical concept of justice is more a “grace justice.” As believers, it is important to our faith that we understand this “grace justice” in comparison to “secular justice.” Our society today is caught up in equal rights, equality under the law, all people being created equal, liberty and justice for all, equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity employment, and so on. Now don’t get me wrong, I believe all these are noble ideals. The pursuit of civil rights has freed many people from slavery and oppression.

However, for those who seek to follow Jesus, a “grace justice” is more biblical than a parity justice. God looks into the eyes of sinners of all kind, then forgives what they’ve done ... pardons every last one who is truly repentant, then welcomes them as honored citizens into the kingdom of heaven. God’s concept of justices goes way beyond fairness ... way beyond even-handedness ... way beyond equality and parity. God’s concept of justice ... God’s concept of what is right is intimately grounded in the generous giving of grace.

Today’s lessons from Isaiah and Psalm 72 clearly outline the Advent promise of justice. Listen to this contemporary rendering of Psalm 72: *O God of love, grant to Your sons and servants the grace to represent You effectively in our discordant world. Give us the courage to put our lives on the line in communicating life and truth to all Your creatures wherever they may be found. Where there is injustice, may we diagnose its cause and discover its cure. Where there is bigotry, teach us how to love and how to encourage others to love. Where there is poverty, help us to share the wealth that has come from Your hand. Where there is war and violence, may we be peacemakers that lead people to Your eternal peace. Help us, O God, to become what You have destined and empowered us to become. Where there is darkness, may we become the rays of Your sun that banish the gloom of lonely lives. Where there is drought, let us be fresh flowers that turn barren deserts into green meadows. Where there is ugliness and distortion, enable us to portray the beauty and order of Your will and purposes.*

In Isaiah 11, the prophet saw a time when peace with justice will reside in that Coming King: *... the spirit of counsel and might ... he shall have the ability to discern the inner motives of people. He shall decide with equity for the meek of the earth. No favors will be given.* For those who believe, these virtues of justice and fairness are found in Jesus Christ. They can be appropriated, at least in some measure, by those who closely follow his life and example. If peace is one leg of the Advent journey, then justice is the second leg. In the spirit of fairness and justice, our goal ought to be to appropriate these virtues as God dispenses them to us through the justice of Jesus. We should not let our thoughts and feelings about justice be governed by anything else than by God’s grace.

It is far too easy to judge the world and people by our high standards when in fact we ought to first judge ourselves. Today everyone is a pseudo-lawyer wanting revenge ... wanting their pound of flesh ... wanting to judicate everything because they feel they have been wronged ... or feel they are entitled to their definition of fair share ... it seems like its always about “my rights” ... “my hurt feelings” ... “everyone else is to blame for my problems.”

In a courtroom drama written by Judge Curtis Bok, the plaintiff, who was a sculptor, at one point asked the judge in frustration, "Isn't this a court of justice?" Replied the judge, "No! This is a court of law. Justice is an ideal like truth and beauty. As you try to achieve beauty with your mallet and chisel, so law is our tool in the pursuit of justice." And likewise, in our faith, we are God's tools of His "grace justice."

In many ways, Advent is a call to action since we accept some responsibility for God's reputation when we choose to call ourselves the people of God. Werbell's and Clark's book, "The Lost Hero," sums up their story of one Swedish man's heroic efforts to save Jews from extermination: *If the Holocaust is to be taken as evidence that human nature is essentially evil, then Raoul Wallenberg's life must be considered as evidence that it is not ... when Wallenberg saved more than thirty thousand lives ... he saved humanity's reputation.* In like fashion, your efforts ... my efforts within the context of the Christian faith have a similar dimension. As the world around us appears to be crumbling ... coming a part at the seams ... when we see unfairness ... when we experience inequality ... when we encounter oppression and illegal acts, our faith calls upon us to act ... to cry out for justice ... to work on God's behalf and not our own. Living with injustice is part of life, but so is living the Gospel! If we preach and live the Gospel, we can not help to judge the world because our faith has us "standing against" many of the ways of this current world ... more specifically "standing against" the behavior and attitude of this current presidential administration.

An old anecdote regarding justice: A Quaker in Pennsylvania was riding homeward toward the city one evening and was surprised by a robber, his face covered with a coating of soot, and riding a horse in which one could count every rib, bone and joint under the skin. The teeth alone could not be counted, for they were all worn away with many years of chewing not oats, but straw. "Child of God," said the robber, "My horse here can remember the flight of the Israelites from Egypt, and I would like to exchange him for a younger beast, like yours. If you are willing, we will make the exchange. I have loaded pistols here; and you certainly have nothing of the kind."

The Quaker thought to himself: "I have another horse at home, but no second life." So he obeyed. They exchanged horses with one another, and the robber rode off on the Quaker's fine steed, while the latter led the robber's poor beast by the bridle. But when they reached the city, the Quaker laid the bridle on the horse's back, saying, "Go ahead, Lazarus; thou knowest the way to the stall better than I." The horse obeyed, and he followed it through alley after alley, until it stopped at a certain stable door. The Quaker promptly tried the house door, found it unlocked, and went in.

There was the robber, just wiping his face clean with an old woolen sock and completely taken by surprise. "Didst thee have a good journey home?" asked the Quaker, politely. "Now if thou are willing, we will exchange horses again. Thine is before the door; just show me where mine is, and I will take it." The rascal saw himself cornered and, willy-nilly, he gave the Quaker his good horse back. "And now, kindly be so good as to pay me a couple of crowns for the use of my horse. The old horse and I walked together." And again, the fellow had no choice; he must pay the two crowns. "The animal has a very easy gait, has he not?" said the Quaker. Justice prevailed!

As God's servants, as followers of Jesus Christ, we cannot ignore, deny, or run away when we know something is wrong ... when we know someone is hurting another, be it physical or emotional ... when we are aware of someone cheating another, robbing them of their rights. Praying for God's will to be done, we stand ready to serve, because in fact, God may be waiting to work His will through our lives. I know the issue of justice in the Bible can be confusing. We would rather have all things black and white. Realistically, life's circumstances are rarely black and white. We often live in the gray areas comforted by God's "grace justice."

In a "Peanuts" comic strip, one of the little girls was saying that Christmas is a time for kindness and good will; a time when we accept one another, welcoming others into our homes and into our lives. Charlie Brown responds by saying, "Why just at Christmas? Why can't we be kind and accepting and hospitable all through the year?" She looks at Charlie Brown and says, "What are you, some kind of religious fanatic?"

This second Sunday in Advent brings us the promise of justice ... a promise of peace with justice. Even the apostle Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah, "The root of Jesse shall come, and he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles hope." As we welcome Emmanuel into the world this Season, let us strive to be just in our actions ... strive to live in peace ... be in peace ... work for peace. Let us live each day Paul's benediction: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope* (vs. 13).